

Patricia:

Twenty-four years ago, Benedictines from around the world gathered at Worth Abbey in Sussex, England for the first International Conference of Benedictine Educators. For lay people working in schools with aging monks and sisters, the key question seemed to be, “Is it possible to be a Benedictine school without Benedictine religious?” And what would that look like? While we have had many rich discussions since then about shared values, and the formation of faculty, and our numbers and representative countries have grown, we have never asked the actual recipients of all our labors - the students themselves - how we are doing in conveying the Benedictine ethos, and creating schools that allow young people to experience the love of Christ through our work among them. Today, that changes. We have invited four people, from different parts of the globe, but all having been educated by Benedictines, to share with us their reflections on their education, and its effect on them as they enter into adulthood, and their incipient career paths. I am pleased to introduce them to you. Joshua Oduor is 25 and is from Nairobi, Kenya, where he attended St. Scholastica Catholic School. He is currently working on a Masters in Physics. Owain Daley is 20 and is from Wales. He attended Downside Secondary School in England and is studying to be a veterinarian. Jefferson Perreira is 24, and is a graduate of St. Benedict’s Prep in Newark, NJ in the USA. He graduated from Harvard University and is teaching math at St. Benedict’s. Martín Rosselot Saavedra is 23, and is a graduate of San Benito in Santiago, Chile. He is studying Computer Engineering, and continues to work with the Manquehue Community. Their presentation, We are Your Legacy - Rejoice! is in four parts.

Part One: It’s early life and Learning**Joshua:**

The transformative impact of the Benedictine community on my life is something that resonates deep within me. It is said that the best and most beautiful things in this world are felt with the heart, and indeed, I have felt the profound influence of the Benedictine values that permeated my early years. As I reflect on my educational journey, having experienced two different school environments - a Benedictine primary school and an Anglican Church of Kenya secondary school - the stark disparity in values becomes evident.

The Benedictine values have been an integral part of my upbringing and continue to shape my life. The concept of community, for instance, became palpable during my early years at St. Scholastica's Catholic School. It was in my first music class, when we received state-of-the-art musical instruments donated by the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, that the significance of being a united community began to unfold. I was privileged to be selected as part of the inaugural school band, and together, we forged a community from the ground up. Through countless Thursday rehearsals and shared learning experiences, we grew together. Three years later, our dedication and harmony would lead to

invitations to perform at prestigious events, such as a memorable performance for the President of Kenya. It was through this musical community that we learned the power of collaboration in achieving success.

However, it was during a dark period in 2009 that the essence of community truly manifested. A close friend and member of our musical group fell victim to cancer, ultimately succumbing to the illness. In the face of this tragedy, our Benedictine community rallied around him, offering unwavering support and ensuring he had the best possible experience at school. We assisted him in his studies, providing the necessary care and encouragement during his treatment. This experience deeply ingrained in me the value of being there for one another in times of adversity.

At St. Scholastica's Catholic School, community building extended beyond the realm of music. Regular Masses held on the first Friday of each month played a pivotal role in fostering faith and discipline among students. What made these gatherings truly remarkable was the inclusive nature of the school community. Regardless of one's religious background, all were welcomed to participate in the services. This practice exemplified the spirit of unity and respect that defined our school, showcasing that diversity could coexist harmoniously within a shared community.

In addition to fostering inclusivity, the Benedictine community championed equality, particularly for students from humble backgrounds. I vividly recall a trip to Mombasa during my final year at St. Scholastica. As the trip approached, it became evident that a few of us, including myself, would be unable to afford the expenses. However, during the Parents' Day event in the second term, the parents and the school joined forces to fundraise, ensuring that each student could partake in the excursion. Furthermore, fortunate students would kindly donate school shirts and shorts to those in need at the beginning of each term. This demonstrated the community's commitment to fostering an environment where everyone was treated equally, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The impact of the Benedictine community has not waned as I transitioned into my secondary education. The values instilled within me during my time at St. Scholastica remained steadfast, guiding me through this new phase of life. The lessons of community, support, inclusivity, and equality have become an integral part of who I am today, shaping my interactions, choices, and perspective on the world.

In essence, the Benedictine community's profound influence on my life transcends mere educational experiences. It has brought a deep understanding of the power of unity, compassion, and shared values. These lessons continue to inspire me to be an advocate for community building, inclusivity, and equality in every aspect of my life, as I strive to create a world where the transformative essence of the Benedictine values can be felt by all.

Martín:

I studied at Colegio San Benito, the first of the three schools of the Apostolic Movement Manquehue. This is a private school that covers ages from 4 to 18. I had the privilege of spending those 14 years at San Benito.

There are three things that I believe were central during my school life, and they are thanks to the way the Apostolic Movement Manquehue provides us with Benedictine education: community, “tutoría”, and Lectio Divina.

“Tutoría” in my school is a concept that involves a friendship between an older person and a younger one, where the older person evangelizes the younger. This is central to everything done at my school. There's a special hour dedicated solely for older students to befriend the younger ones and teach them to read the Bible. Throughout my school life, I had these “tutores” accompanying me, present for things that were important to me. I don't recall learning something that changed my life during those hours, but I believe it helped build a sense of community between older and younger students, which later allowed me to discuss meaningful things with them. I could learn from their experiences of faith. All the activities I engaged in at my school were marked by “tutoría”. I think this is what led me, a person who was very concerned about what others thought of me at the age of 15, especially my classmates, to fully open up to faith since the older students who became my friends were also open to faith. Not only open, but actively seeking to encounter God.

Lectio Divina is something we have been taught since we were children. It's something I've always been familiar with. In my school, we would engage in a form of Lectio Divina for the first 15 minutes of each morning. At the age of 13, we were given the opportunity to join a group that met weekly to do Lectio Divina, guided by a “tutor”. At 16, we were given the opportunity to become that “tutor”. These groups usually started with the group of friends one had at that time, so Lectio Divina became part of that friendship, and it became common to share the Word of God among ourselves. All of this has fostered a true relationship of personal dialogue with God in me. It doesn't feel strange for me, something that I think would be for other people, to say that God speaks to me daily through the scriptures. I lived my school life with God by my side.

Lastly, the community. "Community" is a word that is constantly present in my school. The Lectio groups are called community, each grade is a community, and all the people involved in the school are a community. I always belonged to some community during my school life. This sense of belonging is within reach of any student. I believe this was made possible thanks to the two elements mentioned above: “tutoría” and Lectio Divina. When a significant part of the school is open to friendship and the Word of God, being a community becomes very easy. For me, belonging to a community that seeks happiness was crucial in motivating me in my studies, my friendships, and my mission.

Owain:

Community was fundamental during my time at Downside. The school was a community and I experienced this in many different ways.

Downside was originally a monastic school, while the monks were still at the school it very much felt like part of an extended monastic community. This was especially due to the shared Sunday Mass with the monks, where students had an integral role in the liturgy. The school and the monastery shared one patron (St. Gregory the Great) and for me at least, his Feast day was always a particular point of closeness between the life of the monks and of the school.

When I started at Downside very few monks still worked in the school, but they were still central. The life of the monastery next door was impossible not to notice, with the bell tolling for offices and Mass. Joint masses between the monks and school were always, at least for me, the pinnacle of the unity of these two parts of the same community. Even with little practical involvement of the monks, the Sunday mass continued to hold us together, and allow the monk's life to flow into the school.

Toward the end of my time at the Downside, the monks decided to move to a new home. The practical manifestations of this, in terms of the school's day to day running, were small; but the change was stark. The monk's absence is particularly noticeable at mass.

However, the school Mass remains a key moment in the week. It still serves, in my opinion, as the climax of a community life, which is built every day in so many different ways. The time we spend in Sunday mass together is only a fraction of the time spent together as a school community. But I think it is where the many different elements of community building come together in one act of turning towards the Lord.

Downside is a boarding school, and this was key to my experience of community. Students are arranged into 'houses'. In practical terms your House is the physical location where you sleep, but it is much more than this. Your house is your community, you sit with your house at mass, compete for them in competitions, and engage in many recreational activities together. Each house contains a cross section of different year groups and is led by a 'Housemaster', who has responsibility for the pastoral and academic care of the pupils in their house. The Housemaster gets to know the children in his care well, he can tailor support, encouragement and correction to their individual needs. A good housemaster 'knows his own sheep and his own know him'.

The mix of year groups in a house is key to its function as a community. Pupils of different ages can interact, friendships can be made which are not merely confined to your academic year. Also, in the way of a good community, older members can set an example for younger members, and help them out, not becoming too distant or caught up in their own concerns. In fact, Downside has a specific

system for this which I will come to later. Each house has its own characteristic and I very much felt I belonged in my house. Houses break the larger school community into human units. Having several smaller communities allows the school to function better as one large one.

At Downside, in the tradition of the Manquehue Apostolic Movement, Pupils are invited to join a Lectio Divina group. (By Lectio Divina we mean the prayerful reading of the scriptures in order to encounter Christ.) In these groups students join together under the leadership of an older student to encounter Christ through his word. During the group meeting there is a time where to share with each other our personal reflections on encountering Christ in the scriptures. Lectio groups become a close community, a place of trust. Students can walk together not just in their academic journeys, not just in their social times, or meal times, but in their journeys of faith. For me being in a Lectio group was fundamental to my experience of Downside. It allowed me to see that it was Christ himself who held our community together and gave it meaning. Though not all the students got involved, I think the community life fostered in Lectio groups did flow out into the life of the school in a similar way to how the Monk's life had done.

My understanding of community grew as I went through the school, but even within my first few days there I was hit by the impact of belonging to a community. I have played the bagpipes since I was nine years old. Downside had a pipe band and when I had just joined I was taken along to a rehearsal by one of my teachers. I was immediately welcomed. Again, there were pupils from a range of different year groups who were friendly and showed interest in me. Thanks to the community of the pipe band, merely a week and a bit into my time at the school there were people I felt I knew who smiled, said hello and checked up on me round the school.

Community was also very present in sport. I became a core member of the cross-country running squad. We actually competed very little, but ran frequently together and simply enjoyed getting outside and being together. Here again, there was a mix of different years in the group, but we all felt very able to chat, pull each other's leg and encourage one another. The teachers, though obviously in a position of authority, were also very much part of the group. They did everything we did with us, joked and chatted with each of us and knew us well. I did not start running really other than to avoid other sports, but it was so enjoyable doing it as part of a group that it became one of the highlights of my week. I improved much more as a runner than I could have done alone. What I learned and developed in the community started to manifest whilst I was alone (I'm now a keen runner with or without a group). Actually, this was also the case with learning to pray through Lectio groups. Something I learned initially in a community became something integral to me as an individual and lectio now forms a key part of my life both when I am with other people and when I am alone.

One final reflection on my experience of community at Downside is that it allows those who don't believe in Christ, or who are unsure in their faith to enter even so, into the life of a Benedictine

school, and be touched by Christ. This is something which I will touch on a bit more later when considering what a benedictine school can offer to someone with no background of faith.

Jefferson:

When I first walked through the doors of St. Benedict's Prep, I had no idea that my time at Benedict's would define the trajectory of my life. While I had enrolled at the school because it was the closest and cheapest option for a private high school, St. Benedict's has shaped me into the person I am today in a way that is uniquely Benedictine. My way of seeing and living in the world is oriented by the Benedictine values that are the foundation of the community and education at St Benedict's. The values of community, justice, moderation, stewardship, and dignity in work are some of the Benedictine values that I carry with me wherever I go. I received these values at St. Benedict's, and took them with me to Harvard, where they guided me through more difficult and unfamiliar challenges. Today, I have returned to Benedict's as an educator, where I work every day to practice and teach these values to my students and the community. St. Benedict's not only gave me a set of guiding values, but a home, a family, and a connection to a tradition that continues to grow and evolve.

I was a student at St. Benedict's from age 14 to 17. Before my time at the school, I never felt attached to a particular community. As a child of immigrant parents, I often felt alone in navigating life in the United States— the feeling of being “neither here nor there” in terms of my identity and role in the community were all too familiar. As a survival tactic, I grew up focusing on my own individual growth and development separate from the needs of others.

St. Benedict's took me out of this individualistic state of mind by giving me a place and purpose within the community. This did not happen without my resistance, however. For a young Jefferson, being punished for the mistakes and offenses of his peers was incredibly challenging. After all, why should my grades suffer because of another student? Why should the whole school have to stay after hours because of stealing? The purpose of these often frustrating things is to cultivate community and insulate against individualism. They orient students and faculty to not only their own success, but that of the community.

Part two: The lasting influence of their benedictine education

Owain:

The more I look back on my time at school, and the time since, the more I am struck by what a profound impact it has had on me as a person. There's not much, or any of who I am that hasn't been shaped by benedictine education. That's not to say that what I received before going to Downside (in large part from my family) was unimportant and simply got overwritten. But Everything I had before I went to Downside was taken up in my education there and allowed to mature and flourish, and have much added on top.

Music had been a passion of mine long before I went to Downside, but through the opportunities available, and most of all, the generosity of my teachers I was able to deepen my love and understanding of music. The same was true with my academic interests and desire to learn.

These examples illustrate how Benedictine education shaped me, not necessarily by giving me anything new, but by allowing me to grow as an individual. However, I think the most fundamental way in which benedictine education shaped me is by its impact on my faith.

I have always been Catholic, with a strong sense that that was the right thing. But at the point I joined Downside my faith was only really one of practices. The most important thing I was taught at Downside, was how to pray, specifically through Lectio Divina. This is the thing I have learnt in my life which has had the most effect on who I am, and it overarches all the individual elements of my education, reaching into every aspect of my life. This is because true Lectio Divina means meeting Jesus Christ. Christ is the most important person you can meet in your life, and for me I met him through what I received at Downside.

Lectio gave meaning to my whole school life. It allowed me to approach it as a Christian, viewing it through Christ's eyes, not my own.

Downside had a prefect system, where older students took responsibility for leadership. In my final year I became the head of the junior house. This involved taking responsibility for the youngest boys in the school, supervising them at break times and study times, helping out with assemblies, getting students into bed on time. Most importantly though, the role was to be someone who was present and had time for them, to encourage them, guide them, be someone friendly and approachable.

For me this role was a massive privilege and a real joy. Downside taught that to be a leader was to be a servant. I fell in love with the opportunity to be a servant to the younger boys and had the opportunity to experience the joy of being a shepherd to them.

For me, this role was intrinsically linked to my faith; I wanted to be a witness to Christ simply by my presence and ordinary interactions. I always prayed for the boys and really grew to feel invested in them as people. The role helped me to appreciate God's goodness, seeing his wonders in all those I worked with, realising the worth that each boy had as an individual, regardless of their behaviour or academic performance and to have the opportunity to give of myself to them regardless. It gave me the opportunity to grow in my understanding of people, my patience, my skills of authority and importantly it gave me a love of service.

The experiences of prayer and of servant leadership I had at Downside allow me to know that, however I may behave, at the end of the day, my ultimate desire, my true happiness, is to be Christ's servant. And it is these experiences which have allowed me to persevere in the path of Growing as a Christian.

Moving on from Downside and starting to study at university, my faith has continued to grow. It has become my one firm anchor throughout all the different changes of my life and it has given my life a distinct shape. I currently live in a community with other catholic students and am deeply involved in the work of my university Catholic Chaplaincy. I have also been back to Downside to work in the chaplaincy there. Faith has brought me to some incredible friendships which really are life giving.

In all these different ways, and many others, Jesus has given my life its shape through faith. This faith, which is responsible for me being the person I am now, was something I received in a Benedictine school. It is in this way that Benedictine education has shaped my life immeasurably.

Jefferson:

In a Benedictine community, care and attention are given to make sure that nobody ‘falls through the cracks’. Even though I have both parents and a brother around at home, I found a new family at Benedict’s. Among the many adults who cared for me as teachers, coaches, and community members, there is one who stands out in particular. Michelle Tuorto, who has been teaching at St. Benedict’s for 23 years, is my second mother. Today, Michelle is my mentor, one of my closest friends, and somebody who I know I can rely on in good times and bad. As a child of immigrant parents, I often felt alone in navigating life in the United States. My parents did not know enough about school or life in the U.S. because they never received a formal education, so they were only able to support me with resources, but not with advice or counsel about figuring out my schooling or career. This feeling of loneliness has always been a source of stress and anxiety for me. Before I met Michelle, I did not have a way to manage the moments where I felt overwhelmed by information about opportunities. My parents at times could not help me because they were busy working to keep their small business afloat. When my parents could not help me move back home during the summers, Michelle took the 200 mile trip herself to take me home to New Jersey. When I feel overwhelmed with school or work, Michelle has always given me counsel or help. Whenever I receive good news, Michelle is one of the first people I tell. When I receive a new opportunity, I ask Michelle for her thoughts before I make a decision. In a very meaningful way, Michelle is my second mother. Without her support, I could not have found the success that I did at Harvard, where the cost of opportunity and transformation is living in a place driven by individual recognition and ego. After graduating from Harvard, I felt a calling to return to the community that raised me and serve it as a teacher. Returning to St. Benedict’s as an educator gives me the opportunity to bring the skills and knowledge that I found outside of Benedict’s back home.

Joshua:

Embedded within the core of our beings lie the values that shape our beliefs and direct our decisions. For me, these values have been molded by the experiences of my upbringing, particularly during my formative years of primary education. Navigating life's twists and turns, these fundamental principles

have been my guiding light, and their impact on my life has been profound. With an unwavering sense of duty, I feel compelled to share these Benedictine values with my peers, weaving them into the fabric of everything I do – from academic pursuits to interactions with others. I firmly believe that embracing these values will not only help us make better choices but also enable us to evolve into better individuals.

One of the cornerstones of my belief system is a dedication to academic excellence. My thirst for knowledge has been insatiable since my high school days and carried me through to university, where I proudly earned a first-class honors degree. Currently, I am embarking on a Master of Science degree in Physics, eager to contribute meaningfully to society through my passion for learning.

Yet, academic accomplishments alone do not define my journey. In the warm embrace of the St. Scholastica community, I discovered a second home – a family comprising dedicated staff, wise Benedictine sisters, and like-minded fellow students. This sense of belonging has inspired me to actively engage with the school, lending a hand in various tasks such as tidying the dining hall, organizing the library, and maintaining computers. These responsibilities instill in me a profound sense of duty, service, and camaraderie. My aspiration is to inspire my peers to embrace these values, fostering an environment where we all thrive as better versions of ourselves.

As my professional endeavors intertwine with my personal values, I have been fortunate to work on projects aimed at bringing clean and affordable energy to marginalized communities. The teachings and values I absorbed during my time in the Benedictine community come to life as I put them into practice, striving to make a positive impact in the world.

Beyond my work, I am deeply committed to the Benedictine community itself. Holding the position of Chairperson in the St. Scholastica Catholic School Alumni Association, I am privileged to create a strong network of like-minded individuals who share our values and beliefs. Through this role, my aspiration is to foster a sense of unity and belonging among all those who have been touched by the transformative Benedictine experience. Together, we can continue to weave the tapestry of our values and extend their reach far beyond ourselves.

Martín:

The influence of my Benedictine education in my adulthood is significant. A bit of context: I am currently studying computer engineering, but at the same time, I continue to participate in activities with the Manquehue movement, such as retreats, missions in other schools, and liturgy.

The most significant influence of this education for me is to understand my life as a life of faith, without a separation between life and faith. This is something particularly strong in my country, the separation of faith and life. Many people go to church every Sunday but live as if God doesn't exist during the week. Certain aspects of life are reserved for God, such as service and charity, while others,

like friendships, sexuality, or studies and work, are considered unrelated to God. Thanks to my Benedictine education, I have come to understand that God is central to every aspect of my life. My discernment in any matter is done through prayer, seeking to understand where God wants me to be.

Related to this, I also see that my Benedictine education teaches me how to live. It offers me a different option than "the ways of the world." I observe many people influenced by how "the world" dictates they should live, defining what success means. However, thanks to the education I received, I understand that what "the world" considers the best may not truly be the best. In this sense, I pursued a conventional career, which would have been the typical path for someone in my situation. Perhaps, at that time, I didn't consider whether it was the best for my faith or not. But today, I study in obedience to God because I deeply believe that God wants me to be studying at this moment.

Along with these influences, my education has provided me with tools, specifically tools of discernment. These tools are necessary because if the education's influence had only been the challenges presented before, I would have quickly fallen into despair and hopelessness. However, I was also given prayer and Lectio Divina. Through these, I can access at the Truth itself. My school didn't dictate precisely how I should live my faith; instead, it provided me with prayer and Lectio Divina to make decisions. As I mentioned earlier, thanks to this, I can have a true dialogue with God and understand where He wants me to be.

Lastly, there's the community. Today, I have friendships with various alumni from one of the three schools of Manquehue. The education we received has truly fostered a sense of community among the alumni. This community has been crucial for me as I need its support to maintain and deepen my faith. It shows me that there are others who want to live this "alternative life" I spoke of earlier. These are people in my same context, with the same background, who have received the same education, and together, we can affirm to ourselves that this is the way to live, and work together to embrace this lifestyle.

Beyond the "utility" that the community may have, after leaving school, I realized the importance of the community itself. I had always thought that belonging to a community was something innate, something we always have. However, when I entered university and remained connected to my school community, I saw other classmates seeking the same sense of belonging. That's when I truly grasped the richness of community and how my school had instilled it in me throughout my school life.

Part three: What do we offer as benedictine educators?

Jefferson:

The opportunity to grow a relationship like the one I have with Michelle is one that could only have happened at St. Benedict's. Cultivating such relationships between students and their educators is part of the DNA of the school— the idea that the role of an educator is not merely academic, but holistic is

inherited from the Benedictine tradition. In the same way that the monks pray and work in community, so do teachers and students at Benedict's. The adults are encouraged and required to be involved with the students outside the classroom through extracurricular activities. For a community like this one, selfishness must be unlearned. The price for the care, nurturing, and support of a community is that its members must give of themselves. To receive love and support, we must love and support others. Without this mutual act of love, community cannot sustain itself. In the United States, where neoliberalism and relentless self-responsibility dominate nearly all discourse, having a space that pushes against the dominant narrative is a sort of rebellion. Father Edwin, the headmaster of the school, says that the Grounds are not walled off to keep people in or out. The walls denote holy ground, that what we do at St. Benedict's is different from what is being done outside. Marking a place that is built on love of the neighbor is revolution in a country that is plagued by discord and hate over superficial differences.

Owain:

Whilst for me faith is inseparable from my benedictine experience, clearly many students in our school's are not baptised or practising catholics.

I think for a student to receive as fully as possible from a Benedictine education, they must be alive to the faith of the school. But, in my experience many students with no faith were still shaped massively as people at school, and left with many fond memories. Even if they didn't really believe in the Benedictine ethos, they still had many good experiences because of it.

I think a major reason for this is because the school was a community which fostered friendships. If going to school means spending time with all of your friends, you're not going to end up having too bad a time. Further than this, I think having a school which focuses on community and friendship is actually something which is increasingly more unique.

It seems for me, living in the UK, that young people are increasingly more lonely. Community seems to be giving way to increasing individualism. The focus is on measurable achievement, top marks, prestigious university entrances and so on. There's so much focus on personal success, 'who I am' and 'making myself happy'. In a community, who you are is undoubtedly important (and I will come back to this in a moment), but only so much as it contributes to what the community is. 'Who I am' is expressed most fully in forming part of something greater.

In a great painting, the individual hues are beautiful in themselves, but this is nothing compared to what is created when they are brought together, each hue adding what only that hue can bring.

Taking the focus off 'who I am' and 'what makes me happy' is also intrinsic to true friendships, and for this reason I think true friendships are increasingly lacking in society. We don't use a friend as a

means for happiness or self affirmation; we serve a friend because we love them, we seek their help and advice because we trust them, a true friendship can only be about the 'us'.

That may have seemed a bit long-winded, but I think that's what Benedictine schools can provide, counter to much of the world around us. In doing so we can provide something which, whether they realise it or not, many people deeply need and hunger for. I think this experience is also one of the best ways we can hope to bring students of no faith to Christ.

One final thing which is very important to provide and is vital for the experience of those without faith is 'Concern for the Individual'. I think this is a hallmark we can claim especially as benedictines. This is the first thing I thought of when asked what a benedictine school could provide to those of no faith.

It strikes me that this is again something which can make us as benedictine schools quite unique. Downside was a community and each member was part of a whole. This didn't detract from each student's uniqueness, it enhanced it. Every member of the community was valued for the unique contributions they had to make.

The culture of pastoral care in the school worked with students as individuals, treating them each as a separate person with unique strengths and weaknesses. No one was simply a troublemaker who we would be better just letting fall by the wayside. The focus was not so much discipline as formation, even perhaps transformation. There wasn't an attempt to press students into a mould, they were taken as they were. The school came to the student where they were and took things forward from there.

The school wasn't about efficiency, working with individuals is not efficient, it takes time, generosity and love. Being on the receiving end of this time generosity and love has quite an impact, it really helps students to flourish, to grow into the truest, happiest versions of themselves. This impact is felt regardless of your position of faith.

I think it is key for benedictine educators to be those shepherds who leave the ninety-nine sheep in search of the one, to be people with a real passion for the individual beauty of each human person and helping them grow in this beauty.

Martin:

What I see in common among Benedictine education is not just how education takes shape, but rather, I see a community of Benedictines truly concerned about those who are being educated. In this way, education is not solely academic; it is primarily an evangelization, in which the academic aspect finds its place.

I have witnessed how this is reflected in what the alumni of my school take away from the education they received. Many times, the conversation revolves around the idea that the excellence of our school

is not in academics or sports, as if those are the goals of other schools, but rather in spirituality. I believe that this is a reflection of the evangelization that takes place throughout the years we spend in the school.

And I see that this evangelization occurs through the openness of the Benedictine community's own life, living a profoundly Christian life and thus reflecting Christ and radiating His joy. In this way, in my school particularly, the form of this evangelization appears through friendship and example.

Therefore, what cannot fail is for the educational community of a Benedictine school to effectively be a community, living a Benedictine life. From our conversation, I gather that this Benedictine life leads to various forms of expression in education itself; it's seen in the form of values, lived experiences, the order of life within the school, etc. But in all that we discuss, it's through the educators that we receive this Benedictine education.

Joshua:

In the realm of life's journey, a simple truth has become an undeniable part of my own path. It's like a thread of my experiences, guiding me through the twists and turns.

Picture a place where faith and values intertwine – a religious sanctuary. In this sacred setting, I've been fortunate to encounter people who embody the teachings of Benedictine values, showing kindness and goodness to others. Yet, in this same place, there are also those who have lost their way, straying from the teachings that once shaped them.

Strength of character isn't something you're born with; it's like a muscle you build through practice. Keeping the values we've learned, like being respectful and caring, is a bit like learning to control ourselves. It's like learning to drive a car or ride a bike – it takes time and effort.

So, imagine this journey of values as a story – a story that starts when we were young. Back then, we might not have known much about the Benedictine values, but as we grew and went to school, we learned about things like kindness, helping others, and being part of a community.

Think of it like a special routine we follow. At first, it might have felt strange, like trying on new clothes. But just like you get used to new clothes, we got used to these new values. We started living them in our everyday actions.

And you know what? When we started practicing these values, it felt good. It felt like we were doing something right, like we were part of something bigger than ourselves. It's like when you help someone, and you see them smile – that's a reward in itself.

As time went on, these values became a part of us. It's like they became the melody of our lives, guiding our choices and actions. Even when we faced challenges, we held onto these values, just like a sailor relies on the stars to navigate through stormy seas.

But life isn't just one chapter – it's a series of stories. After spending eight years in a place that felt like home, we moved on to different high schools. We met new friends, and some of us lost touch with the old ones. It's like moving to a new town and making new neighbors.

Still, we held onto memories and stayed connected in different ways. Some friends, however, changed as they made new friends. It's like they started speaking a different language, forgetting the words that once meant so much to us.

To keep the spirit of our shared values alive, some of us – the alumni – decided to do something special. We created an association for the St. Scholastica Catholic School alumni family. Our mission? To remind everyone of the values we learned and to bring back the feeling of togetherness that had spread its wings far and wide.

Imagine us as guardians of a treasure chest, filled not with gold, but with kindness, respect, and compassion. Our goal is to help new students hold onto these treasures, to remind them that in this vast world, there's a place where values are cherished.

So, there you have it – a journey through values, in a place where faith and kindness come together. It's a story of growth, of staying true to what we've learned, and of passing the torch of values to the next generation. Just like the sunrise that signals a new day, these values light up our lives and guide us on our way.

Part four: Parting words for the future

Martín:

I want to start by making it clear that, at least for us, but I believe many others too, we deeply appreciate the Benedictine education that you have given us with all our hearts. However, I also want to raise something that I have learned from the education I have received: you need to evangelize. You should not be afraid to do so. You demand from us that we live a life in accordance with our faith, which is perfectly fine because it is what will make us happy. Therefore, you should do the same, in line with your vocation as educators. You are heirs to an educational tradition that evangelizes. And I want to emphasize that evangelization is not only for religious people. I suppose as lay people we are aware of this, but just in case someone doesn't have this clear, lay people also should evangelize.

And what is my recommendation for how to evangelize? Live a profoundly Christian and Benedictine life, and care for your students. Radiate your faith. At the very least, be a Benedictine community yourselves.

Jefferson:

We live in a time where technology and social media is dominating the discourse around community. The definition of community is being challenged. For many, their primary “gathering place” are

impersonal and siloed spaces managed by corporations exploiting human needs for profit. Children and adolescents who spend more than a few hours a day on social media are struggling more and more with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Additionally, this level of isolation draws vulnerable people into echo chambers that radicalize them against their neighbors.

The degradation of community as we've seen in the US has resulted in major individual harm and societal harm. This is why continuing the work of Benedictine education is important. We must continue teaching each other how to cultivate community both in and outside our own. We must also let this work transform in response to the changing needs of the communities we live in. The ideas and practices of Benedictine education must be informed by the needs of the community. What this may look like will vary depending on where you are and who you are working with.

For many communities, however, leaning on the laypeople who continue to prove their commitment to continuing their Benedictine education for others to benefit is a good start. Many of us have taken time away from our communities to learn and grow as individuals. Still, we choose to return to serve in our own way. While we may not profess Solemn Vows, many of us prove our commitment each day by showing up and doing the work. We have seen the value of it in our own lives and communities, and we are committed to cultivating it for generations to come.

Owain:

My closing message is first one of thanks. Thank you for listening! . Thank you for what you provide. I have to thank especially my own Head-Master Andrew Hobbs, who puts into practice what I have talked about today, with the help of many others who share his passion, commitment and enthusiasm.

I'd also like to encourage you. As Benedictine educators God has given you genuine opportunities to transform people's lives and to be, 'bright lights' in the world. Hold Christ himself at the forefront of everything you do and know that in doing this you offer to each student at your school true Joy, hope, strength and wisdom.

What you do has meaning and purpose because God has called you to do it. Foster a community of friendship, be part of that community yourself. Invest in each student as an individual, loving and caring for them as part of a community.

Maybe what I've said is idealistic. I understand that it's one thing saying how a school should be run, but a very different thing to run one! You have to make the hard decisions, balancing the ideals of Benedictine education with the often inescapable demands of the world. This is where I have to hand it over to you as people with much more wisdom and experience than me.

But, what I have said today is a true experience. It is not something I created. It was provided to me. I just had to engage with it. What I have spoken of today is of immense worth even if it seems only a fraction of your students experience what I have described. You are sowing the seeds of the kingdom.

The mustard seed may seem small, it may seem of little value, but with trusting patience you will see the birds of the air nesting in the tree you have grown. God has set you alight as a lamp for many, don't hide under a tub!

Joshua:

In reflecting upon my educational journey, I find it essential to acknowledge the profound influence of Benedictine education and the quality of learning it instilled. Having had the privilege of attending two schools with vastly different structures, I must affirm that the sense of community at St. Scholastica Catholic School was notably strong.

The values imparted to me during my time at St. Scholastica can be summarized under the acronym "SELF," signifying Service to society, Excellence, Lifelong learning, and Freedom. These values have played a pivotal role in shaping the person I have become today.

Firstly, the commitment to "Service to society" was a cornerstone of St. Scholastica's ethos. It ingrained in students the importance of giving back to our communities and fostering a sense of social responsibility.

Secondly, the pursuit of "Excellence" was not just encouraged but expected. The school's ethos promoted a culture of high achievement, motivating students to strive for their utmost potential in all endeavors.

Thirdly, the value of "Lifelong learning" emphasized that education extends far beyond the classroom. It encouraged continuous intellectual growth and a commitment to being well-informed citizens.

Lastly, "Freedom" at St. Scholastica meant not only personal liberty but also respect for diverse perspectives and the cultivation of individuality.

However, I wish to extend my thoughts beyond my own educational journey to propose a vital consideration. It is imperative that we prioritize the establishment of a robust alumni engagement program. Alumni should be regarded as a significant part of our educational community. This approach ensures that the values we hold dear continue to influence and guide former students throughout their lives.

Secondly, it is crucial to address a pressing global concern - climate change. We must recognize the current environmental crisis and its profound impact on our planet. As we contemplate our roles in mitigating the effects of climate change, it is worth recalling the bible verse in Genesis 2:15, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

In my perspective, aligning Benedictine education with the global challenge of climate change is not only a moral imperative but also an act of stewardship. By doing so, we can work towards preserving

our planet for future generations, ensuring that our grandchildren inherit a world that is sustainable and habitable.

In conclusion, the values of Benedictine education, the importance of alumni engagement, and our shared responsibility toward the environment provide us with a meaningful framework to shape our collective future.