

The Work of Resurrection

-September 2020-

"Hurry then, take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your institute is, before all, to sanctify youth."

-Basil Moreau, Christian Education, 1856

There was a popular saying many years ago that goes like this, "The important thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." Especially during pandemic times like these, with so many thoughts and emotions and concerns whirling around our minds, it can be easy to get sidetracked and begin obsessing about things that really aren't that important. In Holy Cross Education, the main thing has always been leading young people into the light of resurrected life. Yes, schools have governing bodies and administrative structures and budgets and marketing strategies and employee handbooks and state accreditation standards and lawyers and benefactors, and each of these dimensions of the life of the organism that we call a school is vital for its capacity to receive young people and offer them all a meaningful and long-lasting formation. Nevertheless, the moment that the financial bottom line, or a certain personality, or an academic or athletic goal becomes the main focus, the entire project of leading students into the light of the resurrection becomes jeopardized, and then what is our institution worth?

Let's therefore be educators who ourselves practice the discipline of "saying no!" to the drama that is trying to compete with the main thing. When there is gossip in the lunchroom, we can choose to abstain. When there are changes in leadership and a feeling of uncertainty sweeps over the schoolhouse, we can choose to stay grounded and focus on the next right thing. When there is interdepartmental conflict, we can choose to listen attentively without getting entangled. When we don't get the schedule we want for a given semester, we can use the energy of our disappointment to find creative ways to be of service to our students. When the pay scale or benefits package change, we can remind ourselves of the deep value of our mission. This habit of choosing the main thing through it all will make our hearts open and light will beam out onto those with whom we work and to whom we minister. Our schools will become formation factories where all who enter will be bathed in the deep peace and positive energy of resurrected life. Now that is an exciting vision for Holy Cross Education!

This call to keep the focus on the mission at all times reminds me of when I went to Holy Trinity High School in Chicago in 1987 - as its development director of all things! After the first years, I asked to add two English classes to my schedule, and I was assigned two sections of the "top" sophomores. In those days, the school was 100% African American and Hispanic: kids coming from the rough neighborhoods around Chicago's urban core. Nearly all came from families just barely making it. I was determined to give these kids the same education I had given in other schools for nearly twenty-five years.

The first day of class I informed them that all papers written outside of school would be generated on a computer. Immediately there were protestations that no one had computers or typewriters at home. I then told them that the next day I would begin to arrive at school at 4:00 AM each morning so that I could have the computer room open and ready to go, so they could type their assignments. Because there was no protest, I figured that they would just blow me off. On the contrary! When I arrived at 4:00, the next morning, there were nine students standing outside the door waiting for me. Word got out that I was serious, and the next morning, there were more. Never once were there less than twenty students in the computer room by 4:15, and how those kids thrived! These students simply needed someone who was willing to focus on the main thing despite all of the other things going on at the school and in the community, and the resurrected persons who grew out of that experience makes me smile to this day.