

The Work of Resurrection

-January 2021-

"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

Education is missionary work! When we knock on the mind of a student and invite her or him to open to new ways of thinking, we have no idea what is on the other side of that door, but we are nevertheless called to this encounter by virtue of our vocation as Holy Cross Educators. In fact, our blessed founder, Basil Moreau, established his religious family of sisters, fathers and brothers to be missionaries. These educators in the faith did not just stay in their home country to minister to the familiar faces there, they were instead sent out to far off places like East Bengal, North Africa, Poland and Indiana! They went with great excitement and zeal to preach the Good News, but when they arrived, they were confronted by strange cultures, political unrest and physical hardships. Perhaps we too have had the similar experience of being eager to build the Kingdom in our classrooms, hallways and cafeterias as the new school year begins, but after a few months we feel overwhelmed with personalities, deadlines and the general stress of being with so many people all the time. Fear not! We are part of a great tradition of women and men who are animated by a robust missionary spirit. If we can just remember to take a few moments, perhaps on our drive or commute to the schoolhouse every morning, to check in with ourselves vocationally, we will be strengthened and, like Moreau's first missionaries, persevere. In doing so, the Kingdom will be built in our very midst.

It is important to remember that missionaries are risk-takers. They freely choose to enter circumstances that are foreign, trusting that they have been called out of their normal operating procedures, routines and schedules into places that are unfamiliar. It is, in fact, difficult to stand before a group of thirty sophomores for an hour and then, after a five minute break, have to do it again and again and again throughout the whole day! But that is precisely the call. If we are not the ones standing there, then who will? It is important to remember that missionary work is invitational. Though there was an unfortunate period at one point in history when missionaries aimed to impose teachings and rituals and ideologies on others, we know that the key is really to *invite* others into a tradition, a narrative and a community. As Holy Cross Educators, we are missionaries who recognize that sophomores speak a different language, have different values, wear different clothes, think differently, act differently, etc. but we resist the temptation of imposing our ways onto them. We are tasked instead with inviting them, and all of those we encounter at school, into a new way of life, a way that means so much to us personally that we are desperate to share it with others. Finally, missionaries are spiritual people. That act of trust, the step into the unknown, is high on the vulnerability scale. We know that over time, we will develop certain skills and instruments that will help us to navigate all of the minutiae of the encounter and make our work effective, but the initial willingness to get in there and present ourselves to those we serve demands deep trust in the one who has called us to that place.

I can remember how in my first year of teaching I was so full of energy to be with those kids and to orchestrate creative learning activities in my classroom. Then, after the honeymoon of the first week was over and those teenagers had figured me out - I was not hard to read - I had to find a way to make the next seventeen weeks work! Alone in that mission territory of my classroom, with that group of strangers, the Spirit taught me how to listen to what the students were telling me by the way that they were acting and how to speak to them in a way that they were capable of understanding my meaning. Trust was eventually established, and through this relationship, significant learning did happen. I remember and love those kids to this day and continue to be grateful for that experience. And while I never want to be a first year teacher again, that trial formed me to be a missionary, a Holy Cross Educator who can confidently proclaim that wherever the Spirit may send me, "my mission is the Lord's and so is the strength for it" (*Constitutions*, 20).