Education and Social Justice Project

INTERNATIONAL SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS 2012

A COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND SERVICE AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

About the Center for Social Justice Research, Training, and Service

The Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service (CSJ), founded in 2001, seeks to advance justice and the common good through promoting and integrating community-based research, teaching, and service by collaborating with diverse partners and communities. CSJ works within three key areas: community and public service, curriculum and pedagogy, and research. Through such critical and engaged work, Georgetown builds on its tradition of academic excellence and contributes in singular ways to the Jesuit ideal of justice education and action “for the glory of God and the well-being of humankind.”
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This report reflects on the third year of the Education and Social Justice Project, which provided four Georgetown University students with fellowships to travel to Uganda, Uruguay, Bolivia, and France to conduct in-depth examinations of innovative educational initiatives, with a focus on the work of Jesuit and Orthodox Christian institutions.

We are learning more every day about the deep connections between global challenges of poverty and education. Only through better access to education will the world’s poor be able to seize opportunities in an increasingly global economy. While policy analysts have documented the widespread failure of governments to meet this imperative, we still know relatively little about successful local efforts led by religious communities to advance economic and social development through education. In order to engage Georgetown undergraduates and build knowledge in this critical area, two Georgetown University centers—the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service—created the Education and Social Justice Project in early 2010.

Under faculty guidance, the selected students conduct interviews, analyze best practices, and share their reports and conclusions with a wider global audience. The project is made possible through the generous support of Rodney Jacob (MSB’86, JD’89) and other members of the Georgetown community.

During its third year, the project awarded fellowships to four students who spent three weeks with institutions engaged in efforts to promote social justice through education. Shea Houlihan traveled to Gulu, Uganda to research the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction at OCER Campion Jesuit College. In Uruguay, Charlotte Markson studied the Catholic University of Uruguay’s contribution to social justice, Fe y Alegría’s approach toward education and its implementation in Uruguay, and the tension between public and private education for the poorest sector of society in Montevideo. Lisa Frank partnered with Fe y Alegría in La Paz, Bolivia, focusing on its technical training programs within traditional schools, education and vocational training for people with disabilities, and a boarding program for students in rural parts of the country. Masha Goncharova traveled to Paris, France to explore the critical role of education in preserving the cultural identity of Russian émigrés abroad.

During the project’s first two years, students traveled to Kenya, the Philippines, Chile, India, South Africa, and El Salvador to conduct research. Full reports and interview transcripts are available on the project website: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/projects/esj.

OVERVIEW

Shea Houlihan, a senior in Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service, is from El Paso, Texas. A 2013 Marshall Scholar, Shea researches emerging topics in refugee and forced migration studies. During June of 2012, Shea spent three weeks at OCER Campion Jesuit College in Gulu, Uganda to investigate the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction. From the early 1980s until 2007, northern Uganda experienced widespread civil strife. Nearly 30,000 children were abducted and 1.8 million people were displaced by conflict. In 2010, the Society of Jesus began to construct a boarding and day school in Gulu, located in northern Uganda. Shea conducted a series of interviews with the school’s students, faculty, and staff to learn about the role of education in peacebuilding and the ways in which the Society of Jesus can inform social justice and peacebuilding in a post-conflict environment.

PARTNER INSTITUTION:
OCER CAMPION JESUIT COLLEGE, GULU, UGANDA

OCER Campion is a Catholic secondary boarding school for boys and girls located in Gulu, northern Uganda. The first Jesuit school in Uganda, OCER is owned by the Jesuits and is run in partnership with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. OCER is the Acole phrase for “He rose.” Its inspiration comes from Ezekiel 13: “These dry bones can live!” and refers to God’s promise to give His people new life. The school received its initial philanthropic funding from alumni of an earlier Campion Jesuit High School, located in Prairie du Chen, Wisconsin. The earlier Campion was closed in 1975, but it produced two Jesuits who went on to become project directors and lead fundraisers for the new incarnation of the school. The new OCER Campion was established with financial and logistical assistance from the Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus as well support from a pair of Ugandan brothers. In keeping with the Jesuits’ twin missions of promoting education and social justice, OCER’s primary constituency is bright youth from low-income backgrounds. The school subsidizes a large percentage of the cost of attendance for most students, and some 30 percent of students are sponsored in whole or in part by outside groups.

INTRODUCTION

The long period of violent conflict in Northern Uganda, beginning in the mid-1980s, led to the displacement of virtually the entire local population—close to 1.8 million people at its peak. It is estimated that between 54,000 and 75,000 people—including
25,000 to 38,000 children—were abducted between 1986 and 2006.1 Civilians suffered direct attack, and the vast majority of the population in northern Uganda became internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a consequence of fighting between the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and the government, as well as the government’s relocation directive in 2002. Indeed, the severity of the conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis led Jan Egeland, then UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, to describe Northern Uganda as “one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.”2 The LRA was charged with killings, maimings, and rape—although it was not the only actor to commit such actions. A UN report recounting the atrocities in Northern Uganda concludes “few conflicts rival it for sheer brutality.”3

However, since the LRA left northern Uganda in 2006, many former IDPs have relocated from the camps, especially to areas like the city of Gulu in north central Uganda. Unsurprisingly, two decades of war have caused overall development to lag well behind the rest of the country. Children who were born at the beginning of the insurgency are now 18 years old. Many of them have never known normal life unaffected by conflict. Infrastructure like schools, health centers, water sources, and agricultural facilities were destroyed, but in the subsequent years of relative stability, domestic and international actors have begun to rebuild. In particular, as peace was dawning as early as 2005, the Eastern Africa Province of the Society of Jesus made a commitment to start a secondary school in Gulu.

EDUCATION IN UGANDA

A joint international development initiative spearheaded by Tulane University and the University of California, Berkeley studied the severity of the situation of affected youth in northern Uganda. Researchers found that of the 25,231 children and youth who had been registered by government reception centers after their return from LRA, some 37 percent ranged from 13 to 18 years old; 24 percent were female and 76 percent were male; and the average length of abduction was four-and-a-half years among women aged 19 to 30 years old. Economist Peter Buckland also discusses the dire implications for the youth of post-conflict regions.4

Furthermore, the Ugandan government reports chronic shortages of qualified teachers, given that many have been killed, fled, or moved into a different line of work. Many war-affected youth and demobilized child soldiers do not have a basic education, and it is difficult to incorporate them in schooling now that many are in their twenties and thirties. For those who are in school, too few resources are devoted to vocational training across the board, and, where training is available, it often fails to provide skills intended for the employment opportunities specific to that local community. Consequently, many youth remained unemployed or employed in low-skill industries even after receiving primary-school education.

Responding to to limited school enrollments across the country, in 1997 the Government of Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE). UPE has been credited with increasing primary school attendance; reducing inequalities, especially those related to gender, income, and region; and reducing total fees paid by households for primary education. It is important to note, however, that the general quality of education has declined due to overtaxed resources in schools.

On the other hand, informal education also appears to ameliorate post-conflict trauma in the north. Community education projects such as Undugu Family at OCER (profiled below) have proliferated in recent decades in East Africa as part of a broader “participatory learning and action movement.”5 Such programs appear to feature significantly in the extracurricular education for children as well as adults. In particular, community education projects are said to improve self-esteem, increase participation in civic organizations, and strengthen group solidarity. Moreover, Harris (2012) indicates that because community programs are conducted in local dialects—as opposed to English, the language of formal schooling—they appear to strengthen people’s belief in the worth of their own cultures.6
The Jesuits first arrived in Uganda in 1969 after the prodding of Fr. General Pedro Arupe, S.J. Pope Paul VI had come to Uganda earlier that year and announced, “By now, you Africans are missionaries to yourselves.” Indeed, as Fr. Tony Wach, S.J., notes, “Uganda was ripe for vocations to the missionary and religious life. As Jesuits, we asked ourselves how will they be missionaries to themselves if we don’t send missionaries to teach them?” However, the Society of Jesus hesitated to send too many Jesuits in the 1970s, during which time the country was ruled by Idi Amin, a military dictator and the third president of the country (1971-1979). According to Fr. Wach, “We sent older guys here and told them to keep their heads down.” The Jesuits steadily increased their presence from the 1980s on, primarily in southern Uganda. However, after the LRA was forced out of Uganda in 2006, the Jesuits began to consider how they might pursue social justice in the north. In 2009, they began building a school in northern Uganda.

OCER Campion attracts students from all over the country—albeit predominantly from northern Uganda—and is expected to eventually accommodate 1,200 boys and girls. The curricular goals of the school include fostering a liberal arts education, coupled with vocational training, in order to promote self-sufficiency. For example, agriculture is a required subject of study, as it is the main industry of the area and also helps to offset school expenses—students help to grow their own food. In addition, the student profile is roughly split between girls and boys, although this gender balance is a constant challenge because many girls are expected to abandon their formal education after primary school. In addition, OCER admits fewer children than most government schools, which are required to admit all available students. Richard Olweny, a former Ministry of Education official and current teacher, remarks, “Here, even though there are some who have been affected by the war, the children are disciplined. In government schools, discipline is much more difficult to achieve.”

Discipline is enforced in part because of the robust curriculum mandated by the national government. Primary and secondary education is structured around the exam-oriented British system. Last year, Senior I students at OCER were required to take seven subjects (out of the 14 offered by the school) in order to prepare for the national exams. Teachers are judged based on their students’ success. Students are given awards for ability, promptness, and academic ability. Fr. Wach says, “We want to change that attitude. We want to judge our graduates not on how much money they make, but how they function as human beings. We’re trying to foster the idea of service.”

OCER’s emphasis on community-building extends beyond the classroom. Administrators make a pointed effort to admit students from different regions in Uganda. The country has had its share of regional tensions, particularly between the north and south, dating to independence. Prefect Lakono Joshua, age 17, notes: “Last year a friend invited me to his home and motivated me to look at [his community’s] moral behaviors and cultural activities. I hadn’t seen them in that light before.” Richard Olweny remarks, “I think OCER can also help bridge the north-south divide. Once a child from the central [districts] comes here, they share ideas and resources. They share stories and experiences.” And given the current mistrust of the government in the south, this is no mean feat. “Leadership itself will be easy because they have learned from each other.”

The original benefactors appear pleased with their investment as well. Francis Okwera and Rocher Ochan, the two brothers who gave the original 98.5 acres of land to the Jesuits for OCER, have five children in attendance. In discussing his family’s decision to give the land as a gift, Francis remarks, “We had land, but our children could not go into higher education. We decided that if we gave the land it would be better used for education.” He reports that the only condition attached to their gift was to build a school.

CONFRONTING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AT OCER

When the active conflict came to an end in northern Uganda, between 20 and 25,000 children had been abducted. The transition for many of these children who have returned into family and community life is difficult. Many children have gone back to communities that regularly confronted conflict, where local socioeconomic infrastructure was destroyed. A 2011 psychological study of children in northern Uganda...
found that many youth continue to suffer from psychological stress in the years following the end of the war. Repeated exposure to a range of traumatic events appears to exacerbate suffering. Even four years after the end of the war, some 57 percent of students continued to manifest high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to previous studies of the same population.

At OCER Campion Jesuit College, Nurse Susan Acaa is the resident counselor, and she confronts these sorts of issues almost every day. She comments that when a child comes to her with psychological problems: “After looking deeply into the background of the child, often you find that he or she is not really sick—he or she has been neglected or has been affected by the war. You also encounter strange behavior sometimes, and in investigating, you find that this or that child lived in the bush, had their family abducted, or have seen people being killed. Sometimes they see visions.”

Nurse Susan sees about 35 children a day for a range of physical and mental health issues. Many of them have been affected by war, but many of them also turn to her with more traditional family problems, problems associated with growing up. Nurse Susan sometimes advises students who have felt that they have lost direction to try living for others. She tells them, “Your education is not for you, it’s for the world. You are educated here, but you are will go far.” Importantly, OCER offers every student the opportunity to seek out any staff member with whom they feel most comfortable. The school has also received help from outside groups, such as Health A Lot and Youth Alive.

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PEACEBUILDING AT OCER

During the conflict in northern Uganda, households coped with the violence in a plethora of ways. These included moving to IDP camps, hiding in the countryside, engaging in temporary, day-to-day labor, and, significantly, withdrawing children from school. Given such coping strategies, this case study examines social justice activities intended to promote stability and reconstruction within northern Ugandan communities. These activities include participating in formal education—as discussed in the context of OCER Campion Jesuit College—and informal education, such as music, dance, and drama, as a means to achieve increased economic and social well-being in the region.

Education offers the potential to increase an individual’s productivity and wages, and implicitly, it helps to influence human agency and ability. In a well-regarded study of education and intergenerational poverty, Bird et al. (2010) found that northern Ugandans who had received a basic education demonstrated greater socioeconomic resilience during and after the conflict than those who lacked basic education. Resilience in this case was demonstrated by generating new employment opportunities and adjusting to relocation by reaching out to a new host community. In general, educated Ugandans from Gulu indicated a greater ability to leverage authorities through, for example, writing letters. They were also better able to obtain resources from existing family or clan networks. The Northern Uganda Baseline Survey indicates a strong correlation between the level of education and a household’s income quintile. While three quarters of households in the sample work in agriculture, non-farm activities represent a disproportionate share of households in the highest quintile.

Teaching at OCER Campion consciously highlights social justice through education. As Br. Godfrey Maserema, S.J., indicates, “Talking to somebody who is educated is easier than talking to someone who is not. If I am educated and you explain a concept, I will think, criticize, and give feedback. Manipulating me will not be easy.” In addition, John Mary Kirangwa points to the value of education in privileging certain approaches to life. He notes that, “If a student has come from a war zone where killing is normal, to them life can end at any time. People here think, ‘I can die anytime,’ so when someone dies, there’s a casual attitude towards it. Education has to make students value life as a precious thing and something to which everyone has a right.”

Finally, the school places an emphasis on student government as a way to achieve reconstruction. With the approval of teachers, a child at OCER may put forward his or her name for election to the prefect position. At the weekly assemblies, outside leaders are invited to speak in order to inspire or educate the children. On this point, Br. Masereka says, “We hope to have future leaders who are slightly different than what we have now.”

UNDUGU FAMILY GROUP

Informal education is an important part of peacebuilding in Northern Uganda. For example, Ugandan youth have chosen music as a different form of self-expression and a way to engage in dialogue with other youth and adults. This is because through music, dance, and drama (MDD), many are able to express themselves peacefully and also build bonds within the community. MDD competitions are commonly hosted by elders, politicians, and entire communities.

One such MDD group can be found at OCER Campion Jesuit College. The Undugu Family Culture Association is a “movement that works toward an alternative culture of peace, inclusive familyhood, and prosperity based on the belief that all people are sons and daughters of God, who is our common
parent.” Undugu is a Swahili word that indicates fraternity or “familyhood.” This culture of peace is to be achieved through the mediation of music, dance, drama, sports, games, income-generating activities, seminars, and awareness-raising programs. Some 60 current Undugu Family chapters—ranging in size from four to 300 members—exist in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, the DRC, and even Australia.

Undugu Family was created in Mwanza, Tanzania in 1996 through the initiative of Fr. Stephen Msele, S.J. An Eastern Africa Province Jesuit, Fr. Msele’s work was inspired in part by tribal conflicts and mass killings in Rwanda and by the desire expressed by the 1994 Synod of African Bishops that the Church in Africa become “the family of God.” While working at a Jesuit Refugee Service camp in Mwanza, Tanzania, Fr. Msele saw the city receive two million Rwandan refugees in two weeks. As he notes, “I realized then that whatever we do in this world is sand unless we build on brotherhood because at any time everything can turn to smoke. Then I decided we had to do something immediately: Undugu Family.”

As soon as OCER Campion College’s founders invited the first students, Fr. Msele remarks, “We found that some of the new students already belonged to Undugu groups.” Fr. Msele was instructed by the provincial to start an Undugu Family Group in OCER in 2006, in recognition that the need was so much greater in the north. In particular, Undugu offers support to children who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS or conflict. Fr. Msele says, “For a while, the children forget their sorrow—suddenly they have mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters again. Strangers think we are groups of orphans, but they don’t think of themselves that way. They have educated one another.” In addition, sometimes Undugu meetings turn into conflict resolution sessions. Fr. Msele recalls a group near Karuma, a town in northern Uganda, that included Muslims, born-again Christians, Catholics, and others. He found that conflict in that area flowed from tribalism and religious division. He remarks, “After one of our evaluation discussions, though, everyone was so happy. We did a lot that day.”

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Several years after the eviction of the Lord’s Resistance Army from northern Uganda, the region remains among the poorest in the country. But it would be wrong to think of peacebuilding in the region as premised on the “victimhood” of its residents. The government’s Universal Primary Education policy, which was precluded by conflict in the early 2000s, has now been implemented in the north, and schools appear to be at the forefront of reconstruction activities. In particular, OCER Campion Jesuit College represents the nexus of traditional Jesuit education goals and peacbuilding efforts in Gulu. As a boarding school, OCER privileges intensive study and contact with students so as to educate adults dedicated to service for others. Through extensive fundraising efforts, principally in the United States, the school continues to grow in physical capacity—adding buildings almost every year—and in student and teacher population.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of OCER’s education is its privileging of both formal and informal education. In formal training, students develop vocational skills that are specifically geared toward the principal industries of the surrounding community. In informal training, students are required to engage in extracurricular activities, and many perform in music, dance, and drama or participate in sports. While peacebuilding and reconstruction are not explicit objectives of the school—they do not appear in the school’s mission statement or motto—they are implicit in the practice of many teachers and groups, such as Undugu Family.
FR. TONY WACH, S.J., FOUNDER AND PROJECT DIRECTOR, OCER CAMPION COLLEGE

What is OCER’s history?

In the early 1990s, I had been working with many younger African brothers. They were long-sighted and wanted institutions. It really started evolving by early 2000s. The top priority of young Africans was education—they thought that would be the best contribution by the Jesuits. I was fine with the idea of a high school, because I thought it was a good idea and I saw it as a high priority for young Africans. In a school, you have captive audience for Christianity and you can share human knowledge so students have some impact. The next question was, where are we going to do it? I was involved because I was the superior in Kampala. So I went to a meeting in Nairobi in 2005. The new provincial was interested in starting a lot of stuff—schools in Tanzania, Mombasa, etc. I got worked up, stood up, and said, ‘What about Uganda?’ We needed something here—especially for the north, where the need is greatest. The next morning, the new provincial tells me to start looking for land in Gulu.

What are the current and future challenges you face?

The economic crisis hit when I was home fundraising. So I said we are going to do this incrementally. We started off as a day school because we couldn’t get the money for boarding. We built the girls’ dormitory and now we are building the boys’ dormitory. We adapt. The original group was 35 students from the local area. Now we are up to 240 students. Overall we’ve received or been promised $3 to 3.5 million. Some of it is from a USAID grant for education that incorporates American values in some way, $1 million is from an anonymous alumnus from the original Campion high school, and other significant contributions have come from other groups and individuals.

It costs a lot to ship building materials to northern Uganda. The prices of concrete and steel have gone way up—a year ago the rate of inflation on construction was 30 percent. But overall, I am trying to build people, not buildings. I am committed that we should have poor kids who are bright and wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity. I am always beating the bushes for kids—I ask local priests and nuns and other people to keep an eye out. I steer quite a bit of money to these kids, trying to get people to sponsor kids. The challenge is to get the right culture at OCER—we’re trying to get the right standards and tradition, something that will last 100 years.

INNOCENT MULILI, S.J., HEADMASTER, OCER CAMPION COLLEGE

How do poor students come to OCER?

Because of generous donations, every student at OCER is subsidized. When we go to statistics, though, as of March 2012 we have 30 percent of students (70 in total) who are sponsored. Eighteen percent of sponsored students are orphans. Of those sponsored students, one-third is sponsored by organizations here in Uganda, and two-thirds is sponsored by OCER. Students sponsored by OCER work for two or three weeks during the holidays. Now we are making an arrangement for students who need an extra uniform to work for an hour or two on the weekend.

What is unique about OCER?

We emphasize skills-building. For example, we have a tailoring section (20 sewing machines), and a project on food security. In our budget, the biggest expenditure is on food. So some time ago we sat down and thought that if we produce our own foods, that will allow us to invest in employees. This effort is also meant to teach self-reliance and skills. After all, here in the north, we have a lot of empty land and we receive a lot of rain (the second highest amount of rainfall in country). Agriculture is very important here.

STUDENT LEADERS, OCER CAMPION JESUIT COLLEGE

What do you think is the role of education in peacebuilding?

Aron: Peacebuilding is more important than education. If you have no peace in society, there will be instability. Education is not important for peacebuilding. Without peace—if the rebels were here—we would have no education. If you have peace in society without education, you can still have peacebuilding and
development. Peace is what we should emphasize before education. Without peace, we could not learn—the war would beat up the headmaster and deputy headmaster.

Lawrence: When you see the history, people are getting more educated and developed. You will prosper and have a good life. You will also support others. Father Tony became a priest and he decided to come help here. War is for insane people. If a rebel were educated, he would not even think of war. When there is peace, someone just relaxes. With education, look at Aron—he is already head boy.

Aliro: I believe education is good—it brings peace. In a community that is educated, you will not find conflict. If people had been educated, there may not have been as much violence. Education is good in that we know other things. At least we have good friends from different parts of the country, and we enjoy good activities. With just peace, in my village I would not know other things and I would not meet all these people.

SUSAN ACAA, NURSE AND MATRON, OCER CAMPION JESUIT COLLEGE

Are you ever worried, for yourself and the students, about violence spilling over from DRC or South Sudan?

I can’t say they will come back because according to the government, they will never come back. But you still find these people moving up and down in Congo. We still have that fear that they will come back to Uganda. The children also have that fear, especially those who have been affected. We tell them the security from the government is tight. We hope and pray for protection from God. But that fear is everywhere.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Susan Acaa
Nurse and Matron, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Sr. Santa Acahn
Matron, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Joan Antimango
Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Joanita Asianut
Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Helen Ayozu
Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Aliro Calvine, Brenda Atimango; Lakono Joshua, and Lawrence Kabila
Prefects, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Aete Gladys and Lubangakene Aron
Head Boy and Girl, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Sr. Martina Inyaa
Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

John Mary Kirangwa
Dean of Students and teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Br. Godrey Masereka
Deputy Head Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Fr. Stephen Msele
Founder, Undugu Family Groups

Br. Innocent Mulili
Head Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Francis Okwera
Parent and Benefactor, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Richard Olweny
Former Ministry of Education Official and Teacher, OCER Campion Jesuit College

Fr. Tony Wach
Founder and Project Director, OCER Campion Jesuit College
URUGUAY:
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF URUGUAY
CHARLOTTE MARKSON (SFS’13)

OVERVIEW

Charlotte Markson is a senior in Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service. Originally from southern Germany, Charlotte spent a gap year working as a volunteer in Peru before transferring to Georgetown. During May of 2012, Charlotte returned to Latin America to conduct research in Uruguay, one of the region’s smallest and least-known countries. Hosted by the Catholic University in Montevideo, Charlotte conducted interviews and studied the university’s initiatives to engage the topic of social justice in the distinct context of Uruguayan secularism, including the influence of secularism on Catholic education in Uruguay. Her research examines the university’s three primary projects that promote social justice and identifies the achievements and persistent challenges of each.

PARTNER INSTITUTION:
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF URUGUAY,
MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY

The Catholic University of Uruguay is the only Jesuit and only Catholic university in the country. Its struggle to establish itself is symbolic of the antagonism between religious education and the public sphere in Uruguay. Initially founded in 1878 as the Universidad Libre (Free University), it closed due to financial and legislative restraints in 1886, reopening only a century later in 1984, when it was finally officially recognized as the Universidad Católica del Uruguay Dámaso Antonio Larrañaga (Dámaso Antonio Larrañaga Catholic University of Uruguay). As a Jesuit university, it is “committed to excellence, the building of a more just and humane society and the evangelization of our [Uruguayan] culture”. Currently, the university is undergoing an extensive self-assessment in order to reaffirm its Jesuit identity, and over the coming years it aims to fully integrate the concept of social justice into all curricula, lesson plans, research efforts, and management approaches within the university.

INTRODUCTION

With around 3,334,000 inhabitants and a total area of 176,065 square kilometers, Uruguay is among South America’s smallest countries. Aside from its size, Uruguay distinguishes itself from other South American countries by two factors: its relatively large middle class as well as its strong secular tradition. Uruguay is among South America’s more economically prosperous countries, and its capital, Montevideo, gives the impression of a modest European city. Nonetheless, poverty is
prevalent on the outskirts of the capital, and 18.4 percent of the population lived at or below the national poverty line in 2009. In addition, youth unemployment was at 16.1 percent (male) and 25.4 percent (female) in 2009, and inequality and social segmentation remain a challenge to this day.

In contrast to most other South American countries, Uruguay is not an overwhelmingly Catholic country. In fact, only 45.1 percent of the total population is Catholic, while 10.5 percent describes itself as non-Catholic Christian. According to Marcelo Coppetti, S.J., vice president of student ministry at the Catholic University of Uruguay, the Catholic Church in Uruguay was still very small and fragile when the anti-religious tendencies of the Enlightenment began to influence Uruguayan politics in the eighteenth century, and it was consequently marginalized. It was not until the end of the military regime, which persisted from 1973 to 1984, that the Church was able to slowly regain a presence in public life. However, even today Uruguayan society is extremely secular, and as Any Berezan, director of a Fe y Alegría primary school, observes, most Uruguays believe that “in this country religion belongs in a person’s private life” and consequently “no religion at all is present in public institutions.”

In keeping with the country’s strong emphasis on secularism, education is guaranteed by the constitution to be “lay, free, and compulsory.” While many Uruguays believe this means that religion has absolutely no presence in education, some, like Fr. Coppetti, argue that “the republic’s constitution ensures every parent’s right to choose the education she wishes to provide her child, in accordance with her own religious and philosophical beliefs.” Currently, since public schools offer no religious education at all and most private Catholic schools charge high tuition fees, parents with limited financial means are at a disadvantage since they cannot truly choose the education their child should receive.

Because most Catholic schools (with the exception of the Fe y Alegría schools described in the next section) charge high tuition fees, they are associated with an elitist educational culture, and therefore viewed with suspicion by most Uruguays. The majority of the population has attended and still attends public school, and therefore strongly identifies with this system. It is a common perception that Uruguayan education equals public education.

Public primary school coverage in Uruguay is widespread, and as a consequence Uruguay’s literacy rate is very high (between 98 and 99 percent in 2009). However, many problems persist in most public schools, such as high teacher absenteeism, classes that are not demanding enough, insecurity, and high repetition and drop-out rates, especially in secondary education. Adriana Aristimuño, director of the Department of Humanistic Education of the Catholic University, argues that the bleak results of public education are not as inexplicable as many assume. Rather, they stem from the extreme increase in access to education starting in the mid-1980s. She explains, “Today we say public education is segmented and inequitable, but that is because there are many students there now who in earlier years would not have attended. Before, they were outside the system, and so the results were more homogeneous. So the social problems we see now are the result of a positive development. It is a great social accomplishment that many more children attend school, especially the children of poor backgrounds. The problem is that what we are offering them is not sufficient…A quantitative increase has led to a qualitative problem.” Aristimuño believes that the public school system today has the financial resources to improve, but lacks the vision to move forward.

In spite of, and perhaps partially because of, the problems in public education that are acknowledged by large parts of Uruguayan society, private education is still seen by many as a rival to the ideal education system and a threat to Uruguayan equality. This widespread opinion makes cooperation between private schools and the government and public schools extremely difficult. While slow progress is being made and alternative education options, such as those offered by Fe y Alegría, are now more readily available than ever before, the tension between public and private education remains palpable.

**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

While the university’s current effort to strengthen its identity through a social justice lens is new, in reality it has been involved in social justice issues for several decades. Three projects, all of which were developed in the Educational Policy and Management Department, directly address social justice issues. The first is an educational quality improvement program that the university offers both to public and private schools. The second initiative was the founding of a Fe y Alegría branch in Uruguay within the Catholic University. The third and most recent is the membership in a Social Justice Network, which includes several other universities across Latin America.

**THE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

Javier Lasida, director of the Department for Educational Policy and Management, ascribes the impetus for this program to the fact that high educational quality in Uruguay is often only guaranteed in expensive private schools, which inevitably exclude large segments of society. In an effort to address this inequality, the department developed a program to assist schools in increasing their educational quality in spite of modest financial means and difficult social contexts. The department employs a quality improvement system, which was developed in the Basque region.
of Spain and is applicable to a wide range of different institutions including non-formal education centers and schools with limited material and financial resources. Mora Podestá, director of the Catholic University’s Quality Improvement Program, describes the commitment needed by schools in order to successfully apply the program by stating, “If a center decides to use this tool, it starts a process that involves the entire center—it is not simply applied from the outside. The system lets schools self-evaluate, and lets them discover their strengths, weaknesses, and areas where they can improve.”

The process for educational quality improvement begins with an assessment of whether the particular school is in a condition to undergo the program. If it is determined fit to participate, university project staff visit the school and help the school’s staff and administration define their mission and vision for the future, as well as their own concept of educational quality in the specific context. Once these terms are defined, the school is given a month and a half to try and apply them. It then undergoes a self-evaluation, guided by rigorous standards provided by the university staff, in order to determine which areas are most in need of improvement. From that point on, the project staff meets with different work groups within the school every two weeks, working on specific areas in need of improvement. After a year and a half, an outside evaluation is performed, and the school can earn official certification by the Catholic University for being a school of high educational quality, if it meets all of the standards. While the quality improvement program is officially concluded at that time, the university’s goal is to develop a culture of continual improvement and self-evaluation within each participant school.

Within the Department for Educational Policy and Management, there is a conviction that quality education stems on the one hand from quality teachers and curricula, but also from well-structured management and a healthy work environment. Lasida explains, “It was our goal to apply the program in different kinds of centers and show that the culture of the individual educational center is far more important than whether it is private or public.” Aside from assisting schools and centers, the program’s goal is also to share the knowledge gained and tools developed with a larger public. Lasida highlights that “It is our responsibility in the academic world to standardize the knowledge we gain and make it applicable in society.” Therefore, the department has published articles on its work, and is noticeably impacting public policy, as the government has now started its own quality improvement program for all public schools, and has invited Lasida among others to help evaluate its progress.

In its initial years the quality improvement program achieved significant successes. Participant schools stated that the discussion of the institution’s specific goals, as well as the thorough evaluation of current satisfaction among students, families, faculty, and staff and the reworking of the organizational structure within the school were particularly helpful. In recent months, however, the program has been stagnating. No new schools or centers have voiced interest in applying the system. Lasida believes this is due to the general stagnation in Uruguay’s educational system, and the lack of appreciation for quality education in general. He explains that a higher degree of education is not necessarily a guarantor of a more desirable job in Uruguay’s current job market, and so people are not strongly motivated to seek out quality education and schools are not pushed to improve. Thus, while the project has led to positive results and a high level of satisfaction among the participants, it is currently on hold due to a lack of demand.

**THE FE Y ALEGRIÁ NETWORK**

The International Federation of Fe y Alegria (Faith and Joy), a Jesuit Catholic school network, aims to provide education for the most underprivileged among Latin America’s population. It was founded in 1955 in Venezuela by Fr. José María Vélaz, S.J., who was working at the Catholic Andrés Bello University in Caracas at that time. Together with his students, Fr. Vélaz regularly visited the poorer, outlying districts of the city. During these trips the group realized the need for quality education in these neighborhoods, and Fr. Vélaz began the effort to build a school. Thanks to a construction worker who donated the house he had been constructing for his family, classes began in 1955. That was, as stated by Fe y Alegria Uruguay’s Director Martín Haretche, “where the first Fe y Alegria school began—in the encounter of the university, the communities, and this enormous act of generosity.”

Today, Fe y Alegria is present in 19 different countries, 17 of which are in Latin America. While the network was founded by a Jesuit and is influenced by Jesuit values, there are now about 160 different congregations as well as many laypersons involved in running the network’s schools and educational centers. Fe y Alegria Uruguay is an unusual case within the network. First of all, it did not come into existence until 2009. This is mainly due to the country’s strong secular tradition and the consequent lack of government support for a Catholic school network. Second, as opposed to most other Fe y Alegria branches, which establish new Fe y Alegria schools upon starting work in a country, Fe y Alegria Uruguay works with already operational schools and educational centers. Third, Fe y Alegria Uruguay was born within the Catholic University, with the Department for Educational Policy and Management serving as its main sponsor. The network’s offices still remain within university facilities, and Fe y Alegria and university staff interact and cooperate on a daily basis. Finally, the Jesuit community in Uruguay is extremely
Despite being relatively new, Fe y Alegría has already integrated three formal schools as well as 18 non-formal education centers into its network. The three formal schools are primary schools, which largely follow the regular state curriculum. They are private in the sense that they receive no government funding. The non-formal education centers work in cooperation with the state, and serve children of various ages through different programs. The CAIF (Infant Attending Centers) admit children up to 3 years old, and help families in the early stages of their infant's development. The Clubs de Niños (Children's Clubs) offer afterschool programming for children in primary school, which includes academic support as well as workshops. The youth centers offer programs that are similar to those of the clubs, and the community classrooms assist adolescents who have dropped out and are trying to reenroll in school.

While the majority of schools and centers are in Montevideo, Fe y Alegría Uruguay has also made and effort to reach out to more rural areas, and is currently present in three other regions, namely Canelones, Cerro Largo, and Maldonado. The network has central offices in Montevideo, but Haretche explains that it operates by the principle of functional autonomy: “It is our [Fe y Alegría’s] job to provide a service to the centers. The directors of the centers are our bosses, and we offer support in the different areas they require….Every center has its own director, and they do not answer to me.”

Sister Gisela, director of one of Fe y Alegría’s CAIF and Clubs de Niños, explains that the network is driven by the belief that “the poor should not receive a poor education.” The children, toward whom the programs are therefore oriented, are among the poorest in Uruguayan society. Most centers are located far away from Montevideo’s middle class downtown area, in the slums and rural outskirts of the city. Many of the children live in poor housing conditions with no running water or electricity, as well as areas of high crime. Within families there is a high incidence of domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, parent absenteeism, as well as mal- and under-nutrition. Haretche explains that the goal of Fe y Alegría is not simply to educate, but to use education in order to encourage development processes, which address the difficult conditions faced by the organization’s students, as well as many other Uruguayans. He recalls a saying to describe the organization’s crucial role, noting “The Fe y Alegría schools begin where the asphalt road ends.”

Within each of its centers and schools, Fe y Alegría focuses on various different aspects it considers important for a high quality and holistic academic, social, and spiritual education. These include educational quality improvement, teacher training, technology in the classroom, afterschool support and dropout prevention, and financial sustainability of the centers. Explaining the motivation behind Fe y Alegría’s extensive efforts to improve and maintain the educational quality of all of its centers and schools, Fr. Coppetti observes, “These children come from very poor backgrounds, but they have the same right as anyone else to a quality education. So we strive to continually improve the education we offer.” In order to achieve this, Fe y Alegría has employed the Catholic University’s quality improvement program. At the time of the interviews, the program was being implemented in nine different schools and centers. While the employment of the quality improvement program benefits Fe y Alegría institutions tremendously, it also gives the Catholic University an opportunity to engage directly the critical contexts it is studying and trying to assist through its social justice efforts. Fe y Alegría and university staff work closely together in their accompaniment of each institution.

A major component of the educational quality improvement effort is to assist Fe y Alegría schools in adjusting to and benefitting from modern technologies. Jonathan Obenauer, a teacher at San Adolfo Primary School, explains, “Nowadays a school has to compete with the mass media. A television is a lot more attractive due to its color, speed, and interactive qualities. So what we are trying to do is incorporate these elements into the classroom.” Uruguayan children’s exposure to technology has increased significantly since the implementation of the government’s
Plan Ceibal in 2009. The Plan Ceibal offers a free XO laptop to every public school student in Uruguay. While Fe y Alegría’s students do not fall into this category, the schools have invested in computers in order to offer their students the same technological learning experience as their public school peers. Rosina Pérez is in charge of all technology projects at Fe y Alegría schools. She explains that “For the children with whom Fe y Alegría works, the use of computers is especially important when trying to improve social justice and equality. The only point of access these children have to technology is by using their XO computers.” Paola Gímenez, a primary school teacher and the director of technology programs at Don Bosco School, however, points out that the implementation of the government initiative in 2009 was not very well-planned, and teachers were not prepared to incorporate the new technology. Often intimidated by the change, many teachers resisted the technology, and as a consequence children were not given guidance on how to use their computers to their full academic potential. Therefore, Fe y Alegría has invested a lot of time in training teachers to use this new technology to their own benefit and that of their students. Teachers are offered online and in-person seminars as well the opportunity to interact with each other through an online forum in order to learn about what resources are available and how they can be accessed.

While technology is a large component of Fe y Alegría’s work with teachers, it is not the only one. Haretche explains that the goal is not only to train academically competent teachers, but to ensure that teachers are holistically trained to work in the difficult environments they are in, and that they are able to do their work while maintaining their own well-being. Teacher trainings occur online as well as in conferences on weekends, either within one center or school or at a group meeting among all Fe y Alegría members. Teachers are encouraged to get to know each other better, cooperate more closely, and share their experiences, even among different schools.

Most teachers attended public universities and were not given much guidance on how to work in areas with serious social and economic problems. In addition, few teachers have a background in religious education. Fe y Alegría strives to equip its teachers to face both challenges, and Sister Gisela describes the bi-annual reunions organized for all Fe y Alegría staff in Uruguay as “very enriching and strengthening.”

A difficult task for teachers is finding the time to attend the necessary meetings and workshops. While all teachers speak highly of the programs offered by Fe y Alegría in cooperation with the Catholic University, most admit that they have barely enough time to attend them. Because teachers are paid extremely low wages in Uruguay, most teach at two different schools in the morning and afternoons. Therefore, most Fe y Alegría teachers also teach in a public school, and are obligated to attend meetings there as well. In order to address this problem, Fe y Alegría is increasing the use of the Internet as a tool for training and exchange, and Fe y Alegría staff try to visit the individual schools during class hours in order to assist teachers in their workplace.

Because of Uruguay’s comparatively high dropout rates in secondary education, one of the major focuses in afterschool youth programming is to provide adolescents with a structured environment that is supportive of learning. A school that has invested substantially in this area is the Don Bosco School in Maldonado. The director of the school, Any Berezan, as well as several teachers and social workers realized that there was a need among the population of recent graduates from Don Bosco for further support. After leaving the primary school, students attended different public high schools in the area, which are often of lesser quality and have fewer support mechanisms for their students. Students who felt unprotected and directionless often returned to Don Bosco in the afternoons to seek guidance or emotional support. In order to prevent these children from becoming overwhelmed and potentially dropping out of school, the Don Bosco School, with Fe y Alegría’s help, decided to implement an afterschool program, which offers academic support as well as workshops for the children who graduated the previous year. As it became clear that children who were not Don Bosco alumni were equally in need of this support, the program was expanded to include all interested children from the neighborhood, and it now offers programming for children during the first three years after graduating from primary school. Currently, there are about 25 children enrolled in each of the three years. Mariana Acevedo, the director of the afterschool program, states, “Our biggest achievement is when we feel that the children have made this their place, that they enjoy being here, and are happy.”

The final area of primary focus for Fe y Alegría is the financial sustainability of its schools and centers. Because they are private institutions, the formal schools receive no support from the government, and have additional expenses that public schools do not have to pay such as utilities. Student tuition is barely enough to cover any expenses, since the fees are extremely low and are mainly a symbolic gesture in order to encourage parents to value their children’s education. In addition, students who are not able to pay are offered scholarships. In order to sustain its schools and continue to provide support to those in need, Fe y Alegría reaches out to domestic and international organizations and businesses interested in advancing its cause. This relieves the schools of the burden of looking for sponsors alongside their daily administrative and teaching responsibilities. Fe y Alegría’s non-formal education centers receive financial support from the government. This is
most likely because non-formal Catholic education centers are not considered as much of a threat to the secularist tradition of the country as are formal schools. In both types of institutions however, finances remain a serious problem, and most of the centers are in need of substantial repair and modernization. Lourdes Sánchez, principal of San Adolfo primary school, states, “We barely have enough money to pay the faculty’s salaries and remain in operation. So of course many things have started deteriorating and many things that need to be repaired have not been attended to.”

Despite differing focal points among schools, there are certain aspects of the Fe y Alegría education that are common among all member institutions. First, all centers and schools work to incorporate Jesuit and Catholic values into their work. While not all students and faculty are Catholic or even religious, the basic approach to teaching and interacting with children and youth is reflective of a Christian background. In addition, in those schools in which Catholic religion is taught, teachers receive guidance on how best to teach this subject. In keeping with Christian values, there is a strong dedication by all faculty and staff to help the most disadvantaged children in their society. When contemplating the name “Fe (Faith) y Alegría (Joy),” Ms. Giménez states “I associate ‘faith’ with the confidence that change can be achieved.” A second shared characteristic is an effort to incorporate the students’ families into their children’s development and learning. Many centers offer workshops for parents and most have social workers and psychologists who work individually with students and their parents.

There is a clear understanding that any progress made in a child’s academic life needs to be supported at home as well and that families can benefit from sharing in their child’s learning experience. A third commonality is the organization’s holistic approach to education. While academic excellence is certainly a goal, the students’ and families’ emotional and material well-being are also recognized along with security as important factors, which the schools and centers can influence. Finally, it is important to note that it is Fe y Alegría’s goal not to limit progress and innovation in education to its own schools and centers, but rather to contribute to a wider movement of change, which includes public schools. In fact, the work done in the non-formal centers is seen as a direct support for the public school system, as most children attending them are public school students. In addition, teachers from public schools are often invited to attend Fe y Alegría workshops and meetings, in order to strengthen teacher performance in all schools.

Fe y Alegría only started working in Uruguay three years ago, and it has already made substantial progress. Nonetheless, certain challenges remain. The most immediate is the problem of financing the network. Though its member institutions are not burdened with the task of finding sponsors, funding remains sparse. This has been a major deterrent to adding more schools to the network, as well as expanding the already existent programs. A second challenge stems from the fact that all Fe y Alegría centers and schools were in operation prior to Fe y Alegría’s founding in Uruguay. While the centers share similar values and goals at the administrative level, many teachers and staff are still unfamiliar with Fe y Alegría’s work and identity. Most are aware of the teacher trainings and quality improvement programs, but many do not identify with the religious background of the network. While this is not necessarily a problem, it does give rise to a different dynamic than in most of Fe y Alegría’s member countries, where the schools’ identity is strongly shaped by being a Fe y Alegría institution from the start. The third challenge facing Fe y Alegría and the Catholic University together is the resistance to private and religious education in Uruguay because of its strong secular tradition. The government remains largely opposed to assisting the organization’s formal private schools.

Fe y Alegría Uruguay’s most important aspiration is to bring formal secondary schools into its network. While it recognizes the value of afterschool programs in supporting children and youth in their studies, formal education is seen as the most powerful way in which adolescents can be guided in their often challenging and conflictive lives. Currently this is not possible due to lack of funding and the aforementioned political barriers, but Fe y Alegría is hopeful to reach this next stage by 2014. A more immediate goal is to increase the familiarity of all teachers working within the schools and centers with the network’s mission. The hope is to increase teachers’ understanding of
The organization's immediate and long-term goals as well as its motivations and ideals, in order to form a more cohesive network that is able to support itself from within.

**THE RED JUSTICIA SOCIAL**

The Catholic University's newest effort to increase its involvement in social justice has been to join a network of universities throughout Latin America working on these issues. The Red Justicia Social (Social Justice Network) was founded by the Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain, and the Jesuit Alberto Hurtado University in Chile. It currently encompasses eight universities—Jesuit, public, and private non-Catholic—from seven different Latin American countries. The network was initiated in order to address the multi-dimensional and multi-causal problems that Latin American societies face today. Javier Lasida stresses that there is an understanding among the academic community that “inequality in Latin America is not only an economic, but a cultural problem, which cannot be fully understood only through the lens of … limited concepts such as equality.” Social justice is considered a more encompassing and appropriate concept for addressing current challenges.

Through its quality improvement program and work with Fe y Alegría, the Catholic University has been working on issues of social justice for several years now, and felt well-equipped to join the network last year. When asked what social justice entails, Adriana Arístimuño, head of the Uruguay branch, answers “Social justice is an aspiration of societies to offer their population the highest possible amount of opportunities. Social justice works to break inequality, exclusion, and injustice.” She reports that since joining the network, the university benefits from a far more structured academic environment to work on these issues. In previous years, there were several academic projects underway, but few of them were connected and could support each other. In addition to the support, the network also imposes an obligation on members to continue their work and monitor their progress. In practical terms, the Red Justicia Social has several different goals. First, participating universities organize faculty exchanges for seminars on social justice and related topics in order to share knowledge and expand their horizons by confronting realities outside of their immediate context. Second, students are encouraged to write doctoral theses on related issues in order to increase the amount of research in this area. The network also publishes a journal addressing issues of social justice. Finally, the Catholic University is making an effort to expand its library's resources on this topic. The university also offers its students extensive opportunities for service work, both within courses of study such as law or psychology and in more general areas. Students are encouraged to immerse themselves in the poorer neighborhoods of Montevideo, and learn and work with those less fortunate than themselves. Lasida emphasizes that he and the other members of the network realize “this is not a new topic, but we are trying to change the perspective with which we consider it, by using an approach that has more depth and is more global.” The network also hopes to connect southern universities with others in northern countries, such as the United States. While North American universities have had more resources and a longer tradition of working on social justice, cooperation and exchange would be beneficial for both sides.

**CELEBRATING SUCCESSES AND COMBATING CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

Although it is young and relatively small, the Catholic University of Uruguay is making a significant contribution to social justice in its country. Its efforts in quality improvement, Fe y Alegría, and the Red Justicia Social are all driven by an enormous commitment by individuals, as well as a sincere effort to combine strengths and resources to the benefit of all involved. The university’s quality improvement program is a remarkable service to Uruguayan society as a whole, as it is geared not only to private or Jesuit schools, but is designed to assist all types of schools in the country. One can only hope that the university continues to believe in the program’s importance, and does not cease to seek out new participants, notwithstanding the current lag in demand. In addition, the support for Fe y Alegría Uruguay shows the university’s commitment to its Jesuit identity and calling to offer education to those most in need. Fe y Alegría institutions are striking an impressive balance between engaging modernity while not neglecting the fundamentals of human interaction and learning. Finally, joining the Red Justicia Social shows the university’s commitment to furthering the academic debate about social justice.

Overall, one can say that the Catholic University of Uruguay shows that even a small university can have a large impact on society in terms of social justice. However, there remain significant opportunities for improvement. Uruguay’s secularist environment will continue to challenge the university’s identity and projects. While this is a complicating factor for the organization, the challenge from the private-public debate can also encourage an important self-assessment of Jesuit educational values and prevent the university from adopting an elitist tendency. Despite the current challenges, the Catholic University has produced an impressive set of initiatives involving social justice since its opening in 1984. Now is the time to see whether these initiatives will continue to grow and expand, and how this will occur. Considering the progress made over the last 28 years and the level of motivation and enthusiasm among university staff and faculty, there is reason to believe this positive trend will continue.
**Interview Excerpts**

**Marcelo Coppetti, S.J., Vice President of Student Ministry, Catholic University of Uruguay**

What is special about Fe y Alegría programs in comparison with others?

First of all, children need a space where they feel sheltered and safe. These children come from very poor backgrounds, but they have the same right as anyone else to a quality education. So, we strive to continually improve the education we offer. In order to achieve this, a lot of effort is put into training teachers and all staff so that they work just as well as what would be the standard in a middle-or upper-class school.

In addition, our educational plan also includes a religious component. We are not interested in simply replicating the public school system. Uruguay is a country with high school-access rates, so we are not simply trying to replicate the public school system and improve it. We are trying to contribute something more. Public school education is completely secular and does not offer the children any instruction in religious values or even religious history. We believe it is our job to contribute in this area by offering education that also enables the meeting with the figure of Jesus Christ.

How do you perceive the tension between Fe y Alegría wanting to educate the poorest sector of the population and at the same time, because it is a private institution, having to charge tuition?

The sums that the students’ families pay are basically symbolic fees. They are minimum dues that do not suffice to cover any costs. But, it is important to create the feeling in people that they have to make a small effort in order to achieve something, and that not everything can be given out for free. Fe y Alegría exists thanks to the domestic businesses and international foundations that make donations to our organization. There are people who realize that this is important work and then decide to help.

How do you perceive the tension between public school education and Fe y Alegría education?

There is definitely a tension. Uruguay has a very homogenizing culture and there is a widespread attitude that everyone should attend public school. But, the republic’s constitution states that every parent has the right to choose the education she wishes to provide her child, in accordance with her own religious and philosophical beliefs. Nowadays this right is not guaranteed. A person with little economic means has to pay a private school if she wants her child to be schooled in Catholic religion because public schools do not assure this right. The Church has always been calling for financial support from the government, as it is common in other Latin American countries. In Uruguay, the survival of Catholic schools is very difficult because most people are unable to pay and the government does not give the school any money. If there weren’t projects like Fe y Alegría that sustain themselves thanks to the support of people who are willing to fund its programs, this kind of education would be impossible here.

Martin Haretche, National Director, Fe y Alegría Uruguay

Would you say that Fe y Alegría education is still impacted by its Jesuit history, for instance by way of values?

A Jesuit founded Fe y Alegría, but there are more than 160 religious orders that work in it now. So it is true that there is a Jesuit mark, and the general coordinator of the international federation is a Jesuit. But there are lay people on the board of directors, and the national directors can also be lay people. There are, however, many differences between Fe y Alegría schools and public schools. In this country much is talked about how to improve the quality of the...
teachers that are in training, to have good professionals and workers. Forming an army of qualified workers is, however, not the goal of the Fe y Alegría centers and schools. We are trying to educate free people, with critical minds and the ability to transform the reality in which they are living. In order to achieve this it is important that they be highly qualified, but that is not the end but a mean. We are interested in educating people who are truly happy with what they are doing, and that can transform the social injustices, which they witness around them. If one compares the curriculum of the public education with the one we offer at Fe y Alegría, one can tell that we dedicate space for this kind of personal development. Public education only focuses on the academic subjects. In the public school discourse people are interested in how many students dropped out, how many didn't, what the grades are, and what the results of studies such as PISA are, where Uruguay is descending. We are also interested in these things, but they are not the most essential. Obviously if we are receiving bad academic results this will worry us. But we don't exclusively put our energy there.

**Why do you choose to work in education?**

In Fe y Alegría we believe that education is the best tool for changing the reality in which every one of us is placed. Education is the weapon of the poor — especially formal education. So we lay our stakes on formal education, and our non-formal education programs are always meant to support formal education. Because of this we are hoping to open secondary schools by approximately 2013 or 2014. The problem is that we cannot count on the financial support of the government, so everything is much more costly.

**PAOLA GIMÉNEZ, TEACHER, OBRA SOCIAL Y EDUCATIVA DON BOSCO, MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY**

**On a teacher's work:**

I think we as teachers play a fundamental role because learning how to read, investigate, and accumulate knowledge opens many doors. Nowadays a child can look up something in the Internet and can see many things. But there are things only teachers and family, as people, can transmit and generate in children: the joy of learning and dignity.

In this neighborhood I think it is very important to work on dignity and to help people value their work. You can't simply say, “They live this way and will continue to live like that. And I live like this and have no other future.” I think this is a very negative attitude, both as a society and a person. I can't get up every morning believing that everything is lost. I have to believe that something can change, something can get better, and I can teach them something. Maybe they will only learn very simple things, but if they find joy in being here and learning everyday, then that's something.

I love teaching first grade and seeing children's development starting from the first day of classes when they don't know a single letter. I have always found it spectacular to watch a child who didn't know how to read and didn't even want to come into the classroom because [he] felt completely overwhelmed, and at the end of the year [he] knows how to write.

Sometimes students come to visit who dropped out of school, and they tell me they are now back in classes. This is a great success, because it means they have been able to build relationships and navigate their path in society. Many students also come to visit once they are in secondary school in order to show me their notebooks and crafts. All of this means we are able to achieve something; we can create networks so that children don't feel alone.

As a teacher you also have to deal with frustration. It is still hard for me to witness a student who is going through a difficult time or isn't able to integrate herself into society. You always ask yourself why you weren't able to help. But these things happen and you have to learn to live with it—you always have to see the glass as half full.

All in all, I love being a teacher. That doesn't mean there aren't days when I am exhausted, furious, or feel terrible—there are many days like that. But there are also days when I can say, “That's why I am a teacher. Because of what that child just said, that's why I teach.”

**ANY BEREZAN, PRINCIPAL, OBRA SOCIAL Y EDUCATIVA DON BOSCO, MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY**

**Can you tell me about specific needs that children have who come from the “critical contexts”?**

[...] Once the basic needs are covered we also try to provide them with a type of education that comes from the heart. When I arrived here I didn't know anything about Don Bos-
co, but I quickly fell in love with his approach to working with children and his emphasis on joy. And when Fe y Alegria approached us, its leading motives being faith and joy, I was sure we would be able to work well together.

In this school the children feel loved, but they are also provided limits. We want to give them the opportunity to achieve, with what they have and where they are, anything they aspire to, through studying and working consistently.

The children here are very affectionate, even though they come from very difficult backgrounds. Many children live in a reality of domestic violence or one parent households; we even have children who were born with an addiction to narcotics due to their mothers’ consumption of drugs, and children that were sexually abused by family members.

But it is my conviction that you will not notice this when walking the halls of this school. When foundations come to visit I tell them not to look for the typical images of poor children that are used for advertisements and campaigns. I respect the students too much to sell them as poster children for poverty. One can live with dignity in poverty, too.

**How and when are the faculty trained?**

Faculty training is not obligatory, but this is a difficult topic. The public schools in this district are rated as “schools in critical contexts.” Teachers who work in those schools have to attend training sessions on Saturdays. The amount of days they have to attend is not so much the problem. But since most teachers who teach here work in various different public schools, the task of coordinating a meeting that everyone can attend in this school is very difficult.

The non-formal education institutions do not have this problem, so the majority of centers that work with Fe y Alegria plan their meetings on Saturdays. That makes it very difficult for us to take part in the seminars offered by Fe y Alegria. In order to address this, Fe y Alegria has organized something very wise in my opinion: we had one formal meeting, which about 18 faculty and staff attended. This was evidence that people were indeed interested and invested in furthering their knowledge in classes they could otherwise not afford. But that was the only actual meeting. Afterwards, they formed a Facebook group for all members in which the exchange and training now continues. It is my responsibility to accompany our faculty in this training process, and provide them with the time and space to work with someone who knows a lot about this topics and has a firm idea of education. We started this program two weeks ago.

**MARIANA MARGUERY, COORDINATOR, VIRGEN NIÑA CENTER FOR INFANT AND FAMILY SERVICES (CAIF) AND “LA CASILLA” YOUTH CENTER, MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY**

**What are the biggest challenges you have in your work here?**

One of the challenges while working with the youth is to make them believe in themselves and believe that they can be different than whatever has been their family history, which for instance often means no one else in their family has gone to college, or all female members of the family have worked as maids. We also try and make them believe in the communal aspect, let them believe it is possible to create something with other people and that they don’t always have to mistrust others. We want them to know that there are adults who are trying to offer them a different world.

Another challenge is to make them persevere in something they struggle with, like doing schoolwork. It is impossible to make progress without coming to class every day. But for any reason, and there are many real reasons, they will stop coming to class. If their mother is sick, if their cousin is pregnant, if they have to take their little siblings to school or their grandparents to the doctor, or if they found work for a couple hours a day. School is the last priority, and making them attend everyday is a big success.

**Why is coming to school their last priority?**

I believe it is because they have a million other very real needs, which come first. Their parents leave home at five in the morning and there is really no one to take the little ones to school, it’s raining and their only pair of shoes is soaked, the streets are full of mud and impossible to cross, or their mothers have asked them to do something else.

These are all real needs and responsibilities, and when they do come and don’t drop out of the program you think, “How strong they are! What a miracle, and how impressive that they can do this with all the other things they live through.” And these are young children—14 or 15 years old—that are already responsible for so much. They are not granted the time other youth have to live a certain time without thinking too much and making a lot of mistakes.
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BOLIVIA: FE Y ALEGRÍA BOLIVIA
LISA FRANK (C’13)

OVERVIEW

Lisa Frank is a senior in the Government Honors Program in Georgetown College. Originally from Portland, Oregon, Lisa studied abroad in Quito, Ecuador during her junior year. She returned to the Andes during July and August of 2012 to learn about the social justice programs of Fe y Alegría Bolivia. Through many interviews, school visits, and interviews with students, faculty, and staff, Lisa examined the role of faith and values in the programs of Fe y Alegría, and how those values are put into action through integral, inclusive education.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: FE Y ALEGRÍA BOLIVIA

Fe y Alegría is a network of Jesuit-run public schools and educational programs, operating in Latin America, Italy, and Chad, with a fundraising arm in Spain. It was founded by Father José María Vélaz in 1955 to provide high-quality, integral, popular education to poor students in the slums of Caracas, Venezuela, and expanded to Bolivia in 1966. In Bolivia, Fe y Alegría stands out for its work in special education, technical education, and educational efforts in marginalized communities, such as among rural adults for whom Spanish is a second language. Their innovative approach to serving these people has had a transformational effect on Bolivian education policy, political will towards education, and societal views of education.

INTRODUCTION

“Sometimes you can spread faith through your words, and that is very valuable. But it is easier to spread faith with actions, and I think Fe y Alegría does that. They help people with the greatest needs. We serve the children in very sad places where there are no roads, sometimes no food, they have to walk up to five hours to get to school, and those who have come into this world with a disability.”
—Silvana Gonzales
Fe y Alegría national manager for public action

Lider Inti Ruiz Machaca wants to be a doctor. He also wants to be a tourist, so that he can see the world. He has made the three-hour trip from his home in the cloud forest of the Yungas up almost 4,000 feet to the mountain city of La Paz, but is curious about New York, Las Vegas, and Europe. He loves all of the subjects he studies at the Franz Tamayo school in the town of Trinidad Pampa, especially physical education and English, and he is equally enthusiastic about the communal living and learning experience provided by the
Yatiqañ Uta. The students of the Yatiqañ Uta (“our house” in Aymara) come to Trinidad Pampa because their rural indigenous communities generally do not have high schools. Lider is one of the youngest students at the Yatiqañ Uta, as he is in his first year of secondary school, but he is also one of the most talkative and inquisitive. He is eager to describe the daily routine of the students, offer his perspective on faith education, and inquire about life in the United States. Lider is one of 56 students at the Yatiqañ Uta, who are responsible for the maintenance of the house including cooking, cleaning, agriculture, repairs, and fundraising, with the help of three live-in educators. This Yatiqañ Uta is one of 20 Yachay Wasis (the Quechua name for the program, meaning “House of Knowledge”) educating hundreds of students like Lider from 210 Bolivian communities. The 430 educational units of Fe y Alegria, including the Yachay Wasis, serve more than 200,000 students in all nine departments (provinces) of Bolivia, a country of roughly 10 million people.

This report covers a diverse array of schools and programs throughout Bolivia, including the Yatiqañ Uta. The Colegio Luis Espinal Collpani, in El Alto, a large city of rural-to-urban Aymara indigenous migrants situated above La Paz, functions as a traditional high school but also incorporates values, technical training, and production into their educational mission. Their 2,000 elementary and secondary school students study humanities, math, science, and trades such as carpentry. The Santa Cruz departmental office of Fe y Alegria is distinguished by its focus on vocational training for students with disabilities. Beginning in 2005, Fe y Alegria connected people with disabilities to training programs, internships and jobs at grocery stores, salons, furniture making businesses, and more. Also in Santa Cruz, the Instituto Radiofónico Fe y Alegria (IRFA, or Radiophonic Institute of Fe y Alegria) was founded 37 years ago to serve adults who did not have the opportunity to finish their schooling when they were young.

The radio program now offers primary education to mothers in the city of Santa Cruz and rural residents in eastern Bolivia, intercultural bilingual education for indigenous communities, technical in-person education, and computer classes. All of these programs and schools are managed by Fe y Alegria.

Two additional Jesuit programs that are not part of Fe y Alegria were included in the research. The Colegio San Ignacio in La Paz is a private Jesuit high school whose graduating classes have carried out annual three-week-long service projects in impoverished communities since 1969, including, in recent years, work with educational communities served by Fe y Alegria, like the Yatiqañ Uta. Finally, the Centro de Multiservicios Educativos (CEMSE, or Multi-Service Educational Center) partners with government-run public schools to provide additional services like computer labs and develop special projects heavily influenced by Jesuit values, such as dental check-ups in the name of cura personalis (care of the whole person). CEMSE employs 56 educators, program staff, and healthcare professionals in in the cities of La Paz, El Alto, and Sucre.

A DIFFICULT PAST

“There is a self-esteem problem here, as many say Bolivia is an ugly and sad country. I have traveled extensively and have seen wonderful things, also sad things, and I would not
Bolivia is widely considered to be the poorest country in South America, with the highest proportion of indigenous people. By some estimates, roughly two-thirds of the population are Aymara, Quechua, or from another indigenous group. The country is landlocked, dominated by soaring Andean mountains in one region and impenetrable Amazon rainforest in the other. Geography, land-grabbing neighbors, poverty, and the exclusion of the vast majority of the country from politics and economic power throughout the past two centuries have all contributed to Bolivia’s current challenges in social justice, development, and education.

Universal education was not promoted by the Bolivian government until 1994, when the Ley de Reforma Educativa (Education Reform Law) and Ley de Participación Popular (Popular Participation Law) were enacted under President Sanchez de Lozada. The first called for universal education, a new philosophy for teacher education, intercultural bilingual education, and the undoing of many barriers that had limited access to education for poor students, rural students, indigenous students or those who spoke indigenous languages, and disabled students. The second established juntas escolares, or school boards, and other communal governing structures and engagement efforts in education. Fr. Rafael Correa, national director for Fe y Alegría Bolivia, said of the reform: “It was instrumental in that moment because it opened the possibility of education for the entire population. Previously, only the sectors with high economic capacity were educated and education was banned for some sectors to control them.”

At the same time, he noted that the vast changes called for by this law were often blocked by the teacher’s union, lack of resources, and the difficulties involved in overhauling a large system and changing institutional culture. Despite the improvements achieved by these policies, many students and communities still did not receive a high-quality education. Before the reform, roughly 20 percent of the population was illiterate and 37 percent was functionally illiterate, due in part to a dropout rate of 70 percent in some areas. While the reforms resulted in an increase in access to education, particularly in rural areas (after 1994, only five percent of students cited lack of a school in their community as a reason for not attending school), educational quality did not greatly improve and so it was not until 2010 that Bolivia was declared, by President Evo Morales, to be a 100 percent literate country (and even this achievement is hotly contested).

A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

We are a movement of integral popular education and social advancement that, inspired in faith and justice, develops, alongside the poor and the marginalized, a quality education that contributes to the construction of an inclusive and equitable society.

Mission Statement of Fe y Alegría

Fe y Alegría was founded by Father José María Vélaz in Venezuela in 1955 to serve the slums of Caracas. It is said that Fe y Alegría starts where the pavement ends, and although it now operates schools and programs in a wide variety of environments, it has remained focused on providing high-quality education to the poorest and most marginalized classes of each society in which it works. In Bolivia, this has meant serving rural areas, indigenous communities, and students with special needs before the government begins to do so. As such, the organization has been a leader for social justice and innovation, which can be seen during a visit to a grocery store that has hired youth with disabilities, a conversation with a student in a Fe y Alegría boarding school who wants to be a doctor, or by walking into a high school classroom with curtains made of recyclables gathered by students concerned about the value of protecting the earth. Many of their models have been adopted by the government as policy in later years, for example, the focus on technical and vocational training found across many Fe y Alegría programs.

Fe y Alegría, which has been operating in Bolivia since 1966, now has more than 430 educational units in the country, in all nine departments (provinces) of the country. These include schools, after-school programs, student residences, radio stations, and special education centers. It has six focal areas: regular education, special education, education for work, out-of-school education, education in human-Christian values, and new information technologies. Permeating each area are four strategic objectives: quality of popular education, involvement in education policy and civil society by the educational community, organized and dynamic educational communities, and strengthening the institution. These strategies have led to improved teacher training, participation in networks with other educational and governmental institutions, and partnerships with the media to produce informative and substantive stories about education.
Fe y Alegria, as a movement, was founded to serve the poor in urban slums, but has since expanded and developed in new directions. Miguel Angel Marca, national advisor for general education, conveyed a deep level of reflection and concern for who Fe y Alegria should serve and how: “Who are the poor? From the classical tradition the poor are those who have no money, and no access to certain goods and services. But I think they are not poor. There are faces of women, indigenous people, those living in isolation and hunger. We have to make a more dynamic analysis of who are the poor and what choosing to serve the poor implies.” Fe y Alegria has chosen to broaden their scope to include people with disabilities in their mission. This is not an issue area that is identified by Fe y Alegria Internacional, but one which has become an essential consideration across projects in Bolivia. Fe y Alegria's initiatives for special education, vocational training, and radio education are examples of how social justice is promoted through efforts motivated by the values of integral and inclusive education.

FAITH AND VALUES: JESUIT, CHRISTIAN, HUMAN

“I want to thank Fe y Alegria because I studied here and see how things have changed with the vision of Fe y Alegria, which has given us technical principles, and we have grown and learned through FyA and the Sisters. They guide us, and taught us that if someone is falling, you should help.”
– Moises Azucena, secretary of the Junta Escolar and alumnus of the Franz Tamayo School

Fe y Alegria is a Jesuit institution, but it does not run Catholic schools in the traditional sense of private, religious institutions for Catholic students who are educated in Catholicism alongside standard educational subjects. Rather, Fe y Alegria schools in Bolivia are public but privately run, a rough equivalent to charter schools in the United States. Their out-of-school educational efforts are also open to the public. Almost all educators and support staff are lay people, but many of those interviewed said their Catholic faith (and often, Catholic or Jesuit education) was important to their life and their work. On the other hand, these programs are open to students and communities of all faiths and beliefs. Father Rafael Correa, National Director of Fe y Alegria, notes, “[W]e call it education in human-Christian values. In Bolivia, now, there is a great emphasis on respect for different beliefs and spiritualities. But Christian values do exist in many religions. For example, Fe y Alegria has schools in Africa. In Chad, all our students are of the Muslim religion. In varying degrees we have African or Afro-Bolivian students, or students that have spiritual beliefs. We, as an institution, cannot have a very limited view of what religion is.” Fe y Alegria focuses on values that are upheld by the educational communities they serve and humanity in general, not just those values that are privileged by the Catholic Church. This sensitivity is balanced with an educational philosophy that is Ignatian in many respects.

What does it mean to provide a secular but Jesuit education? Many interviewees said that the “plus” offered by Fe y Alegria, for both education and social justice, was the teaching of Jesuit and universal values. Miguel Angel Marca, national advisor for general education, mentioned two aspects of Jesuit philosophy that he found particularly compelling: “The first is the magis...The second is the magis for service, and social service characterized by belief, religion, and the choice to have faith in God.” Magis, or “the more,” was viewed by many Fe y Alegria staff as a motivation to work the hardest and best they can, institutionally and individually. Magis means taking better-off students into marginalized communities for service and solidarity projects, staying extra hours to plan school-wide projects linking technical and humanistic education, and asking what more can be done for students with disabilities who have been stuck attending special education centers for years without gaining useful skills.

Another Jesuit value that surfaced frequently in interviews was the concept of education as development of the whole person. Fe y Alegria takes to heart the mission to provide integral education, including health and wellness, job preparation, and civic education, for the students as well as their families and communities. Fathers of students at the Yatiqañ Uta in Trinidad Pampa in the Yungas were grateful to Fe y Alegria for teaching their students how to grow vegetables, raise chickens and pigs, and clean their rooms, skills that they brought home with them every two weeks when they leave the boarding school to spend time with their families. Don Enrique said of his daughter Alison, “My daughter is learning to study, to respect, and now she's well trained in these things . . . At home too, she helps in the kitchen, with the laundry, she gets to cleaning. All that, my daughter is learning here.” The parents hone their own public speaking and civic skills through the junta escolar (school board) in efforts to maintain, improve, and fund the Yatiqañ Uta and the town's high school, a fifteen minute walk down the hill.

It is reasonable to expect an education in values and practical knowledge through a program like the Yatiqañ Uta, which serves as a boarding school for indigenous Aymara students in rural areas, since teachers are responsible for
all aspects of learning and growth throughout the school year. As educator Flora Cosme Aruquipa observed, “You’re a mother to them, and a friend, a guide...things some kids here do not have in their families so we’re here.” But these elements form a central part of more traditional Fe y Alegría schools as well.

The Colegio Luis Espinal Collpani in El Alto is a prime example of values in action. This school of roughly 2,000 students (1,000 primary and 1,000 secondary school students) is named after Luis Espinal, S.J., a Jesuit film critic and journalist who was assassinated by the Bolivian government in 1980 for calling attention to government involvement in narco-trafficking. The school is located in the Collpani neighborhood of El Alto, a large city that began as a slum outside La Paz on the Altiplano (high plain) where rural Aymara migrants tended to settle. The school combines general education and technical education. While many high school students in Bolivia focus on either the humanities or trades, all students here attend courses on humanities, math, and science in the morning, and learn technical trades in the afternoon. These include agriculture and livestock, fashion design, metalworking, and carpentry. To unify these two components of education, the school carries out an interdisciplinary project each year, led by one professor but touching all areas of study. The first year, the theme was clay. Students learned the chemical processes of clay and ceramic production, built a traditional Aymara-style clay firing oven, and sculpted busts. Scientific, theological, philosophical, historical, and artistic knowledge were combined to show the interconnectivity and value of all subjects at the school. In 2012, “Cosmos and Thought” Professor Sister Rosa Canto is leading a project focused on religion and values with an emphasis on recycling and environmental stewardship. These projects literally become integrated into the fabric of the educational experience: curtains in all the classrooms are made of recycled materials, the trade courses use recycled and found objects, chemistry and biology courses study pollution, and thus values are discussed and acted upon in a concrete manner throughout the school day.

VALUES IN ACTION BEYOND FE Y ALEGRIÁ

“We aim for schools where there's greater participation, where elements of the students' own cultures are introduced, where there is less inequality between men and women, and where students and teachers will take ownership of the exercise of human rights.”

– Roxana Lovera Villarroel, CEMSE education coordinator

Two institutions outside of Fe y Alegría but under the umbrella of the Society of Jesus also make values education an integral part of their programs: the Centro de Multiservicios Educativos (CEMSE, or Multi-Service Educational Center) and the Colegio San Ignacio in La Paz. CEMSE incorporates values into their programs in a fashion that is similar to the Colegio Luis Espinal Collpani’s annual projects for integration. Their work falls into two broad categories: services and projects. Services are meant to fill gaps in public education and supplement it, by providing equipment and space for science labs, computers, and health check-ups, for example. Projects take a more overarching approach to changing the culture and functioning of schools. An example is the “Democracy and Gender Equity” project. CEMSE determined that there were problems in the schools regarding participation,
communication, and discrimination, so staff developed a curriculum that could be implemented in all subject areas to improve the school climate.

Teaching teams help carry out the assessment and develop a plan to integrate democratic values and gender equity into instruction. CEMSE also works directly with students in this project. Student governments were formed, in which students elected their peers, with support prior to the election to help them campaign and develop proposals, during the election itself, and afterward as the new student governments began working on their plans in tandem with teachers' councils and municipal governing bodies. This project has been successful in increasing female participation, improving communication between teachers and students, and strengthening community members' sense of responsibility for education. CEMSE has also been operating a small project for the last four years in which 100 young people participate in a series of workshops and then design and carry out a community service project. This type of approach to social justice is well-developed in Colegio San Ignacio, a private Jesuit high school near the wealthy Zona Sur of La Paz. Seniors spend three weeks in a rural community working alongside the poor to build roads and sewers, connect water pipes, fix up schools, and help the community in whatever way it sees fit. The project's goals are threefold: to provide substantive, physical assistance to poor communities; to educate San Ignacio students about their own lives and those of the rest of the country; and to form bonds of solidarity between students and community members. This experience is contextualized in Ignatian terms. As described by Humberto Portocarrero, a professor and alumnus of San Ignacio, “The school sees service work as part of the apostolic mission, to 'go where others don't.' It's an experience based on Ignatian faith and justice, which go beyond theory and into action; the spiritual cannot be divorced from the social. Ignatian justice seeks equitable opportunities for all. It asks students to be 'for others,' and this means being 'with others.'”

Indeed, this type of project is a feature of many Jesuit and Catholic educational instances in Bolivia. Miguel Ángel Marca, Father René Cardozo, Humberto Portocarrero and Silvana Gonzales all described how faith-related service projects through their high schools profoundly impacted them and set them down their current career path. Silvana commented, “I have very beautiful memories of these projects and the people, and the parents, and by chance my arrival at Fe y Alegria has something to do with them.” As this character of education becomes more pronounced within Jesuit programs, Silvana hopes that it will spread into the broader educational milieu of Bolivia and produce a new generation of social justice-minded leaders.

EDUCATING FOR THE FUTURE

“[Y]ou need to develop other skills such as entrepreneurship, to make students also have a life plan that's not only directed towards higher education, but one that allows them to see other options for personal growth, leisure, and other ways to generate revenue and continue studying.”

– Roxana Lovera Villarroel, CEMSE education coordinator

An important aspect of Fe y Alegria’s dedication to integral education is vocational training. Students in many of their programs gain not just a liberal arts education, healthier habits, or self-governance skills, but also a trade. Values are strongly emphasized, as they are across Fe y Alegria’s priorities. Magda Aguirre, national manager for Job Training, said, “Companies ask us to teach values: honesty, punctuality, and respect, which are very important values at work.” People in these programs and schools learn to be good students, good people, and good workers.

There is high demand for technical education in Bolivia. Few
students have access to post-secondary education, so there is a strong desire to finish high school with the capabilities needed to earn a living immediately. Indeed, many students work while they are in school (including 35 percent of students of the Colegio Luis Espinal Collpani) as lustrabotas (shoe shiners), street vendors, grocery baggers, coca growers, and in other positions in the formal and informal economies. While shining shoes can help a student buy lunch, parents want to see their children grow up as professionals, or at least as carpenters, masons, or in other technical trades that are in steady demand.

Under President Evo Morales, a new education law was adopted in 2010. The Ley de Educación Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Perez proposes that all students should graduate with a humanistic and technical education. Magda expressed strong support for the legislation: “[I]t’s spectacular that they’re reviving the technical aspect of education. Today the law says you have to do technical education. It is very important because in this country there are more people with university degrees, but we don’t have enough people that can do the execution, the technical part of a project. College students are often more theoretical but the builder can look at something and say, ‘This isn’t going to work.’ For us in this area, this policy is essential. We are opening many doors, we are regularizing the centers, and we’re working towards higher quality training.” Unfortunately, implementation has proven challenging for the government. The educators and administrators of the Colegio Luis Espinal Collpani, claim, quite accurately, that they are the new law in action, yet they have yet to be certified by the Ministry of Education. Despite multiple visits by government officials and a long history of providing technical humanistic education, their students do not receive the dual degree that recognizes these two aspects of their learning. The same is true of the Yatiqañ Uta.

Even without official recognition, technical education continues to be a core element of many Fe y Alegria and Jesuit programs. The students of the Yatiqañ Uta practice agriculture and carpentry, and their parents and educators continually voice demands for more vocational training. The vice president of the junta escolar, Javier Blanco Rodriguez, said, “The new Ley de Educación Avelino Siñani has already been in effect here for many years,” but the junta escolar is eager to see more space in the school for workshops and more educators hired to teach technical subjects. CEMSE has a project to promote entrepreneurship, and even IRFA has expanded into technical education through in-person classes, parting from its signature radio education method. Finally, labor market participation is a priority in the field of special education in Santa Cruz, broadening the scope of Fe y Alegria services for people with disabilities and shifting focus from the realm of education into the business world.

Although the Bolivian government has only recently taken an explicit interest in special education, Fe y Alegria has a decade of experience in this area. Fr. Rafael Correa, S.J., explained that their effort arose out of the goal for inclusive education. At first, this meant taking a bilingual and intercultural perspective to education, but they began to see that some students were still left out. There were special education centers in various parts of the country, but these spaces isolated students with disabilities and did not provide a stimulating environment for growth, either for the students or society as a whole. Carmiña de la Cruz, Fe y Alegria national advisor for special education, described the impetus for the change in strategy from separate centers to labor and social inclusion: “The challenge has been to change the mentality of paternalism or maternalism, because students are their ‘children’ and when one raises the issue of workforce inclusion, they think ‘Ooh but how, something can happen, here we take care of them.’ But it’s a step we must take. If a young person is in a center for many years, and now has the opportunity to train for a job, it’s much better that they go do that and demonstrate their skills.”

Fe y Alegria still maintains six special education centers but has increasingly worked toward inclusive education, through the creation of aulas de apoyo (support classrooms). In Santa Cruz, staff began to ask whether the education centers were for kids to come and stay forever, or if there was an alternative. They decided that workforce and social integration would be their goal, in addition to consciousness-raising in businesses and the society at large. A team identifies the potential of the young people, connects them with the appropriate education or technical training, and at the conclusion of the training (which generally takes two years), they are set up with a three-week internship. The internship is considered an effective way to sell a business on the idea of hiring someone with a disability. After three weeks, the business is better able to understand the competencies and needs of the young people and learns that they can support people through socially just practices, not just charity. Modesta explained, “There are many prejudices in society—people think that people with disabilities cannot work or cannot speak, because they don’t know anyone with a disability. People do not know how to value and recognize them. The world is not conditioned to receive these people.” But, she continued, the kids do just fine. Their parents worry, their teachers worry, their employers worry, but they’re happy.
Even within Fe y Alegría, the project has been a learning experience. Several staff said that their initial feelings toward people with disabilities were those of sympathy, sadness, and a focus on what they could not do rather than on their capabilities. But over time, staff and participants have become friends and changed their viewpoints. Modesta framed this transformation as a matter of values: “Our values have helped us in this. I’ve learned from these people too. Equality is not justice when someone is in a different situation. It turns out that equity is much fairer. A girl with no hands who types with her feet told me, ‘You know, professor, you say that everyone has to be challenged equally. But that’s not fair, because I have to be challenged based on what I can do, and someone else on what he can do.’ So I learned that equity is much fairer than equality. Equality ends up being unfair when there are differences.” Fe y Alegría’s commitment to inclusive education and the magis led staff into a new territory—the marketplace—and they learned how to navigate this area in order to promote social justice, utilizing a strategy proposed by a woman who herself has a severe disability. This strategy is based on Fe y Alegría’s values of inclusive education and integral education. As is said by many organizations representing people with disabilities, “Nothing for us, without us.”

EXPANDING ACCESS

“The radio is important but we’re not the ones who will change Bolivia.”

− Carlos Sálazar, coordinator of Radio Santa Cruz

Just as Fe y Alegría works to improve access to education through their programs, by focusing on poor students, rural areas, and students with disabilities, the Jesuits have developed another program to move education outside of the classroom and into new communities, further acting upon their value of inclusive education. The Instituto Radiofónico Fe y Alegría (Radiophonic Institute of Fe y Alegría, or IRFA) has as its goal the facilitation of access to primary education for those who were not able to complete school during their youth. This program reaches multiple audiences who otherwise would not have access to education, including adults who grew up in rural areas near Santa Cruz (southern and eastern Bolivia), those in the city who did not finish school due to work pressures, pregnancies, and other challenges, girls in orphanages, busy mothers, and incarcerated youth and adults.

There are three components to the program, which focuses on literacy, math, science, and social science at the primary level. These elements are the written materials (workbooks that students use daily), the daily radio program, and a teacher guide. The teacher guide, who is a volunteer with two years of training, meets with the class once a week to review the lesson and help the students. Many participants are not able to listen to all the radio programs, so this weekly meeting is crucial to their academic success. The educational philosophy comes from Brazilian educator Paolo Freire. IRFA employs the psycho-social methodology of the generative word, and teacher guides receive certificates in popular education upon completion of their training. Like many of the programs discussed above, values, such as responsibility and care for the environment, serve as transversal elements throughout the program.

A group of women meet weekly at the Guardería Moisés, a daycare center where their children are watched over while the mothers work, many as street vendors. One, a grandmother who appeared to be in her fifties and has one year left in the program, said she has recently started studying with her granddaughter who is entering kindergarten. A teenage girl is hoping to attend a regular high school and college after finishing the program, which was a dream expressed by all the girls at the Casa de las Hijas de María Auxiliadora, an orphanage in outer Santa Cruz. One who is about to graduate hopes to become a lawyer. Despite their difficult circumstances (many are in the orphanage due to abuse or incarceration of their parents), these students are highly motivated and form a tight-knit class, studying together every day. The teacher who helps them with their lessons called particular attention to a girl who had just come to Bolivia from Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Other students enjoy learning some French and English from her, and her Spanish is remarkable given her short time in the country.

IRFA has recently developed bilingual programs for indigenous communities, something that Fernando Pérez Cautín, coordinator of Edu-Communication, wishes they had done much earlier. He believes that the radio can be a much more important tool in communities where indigenous languages are spoken, since hearing the language on a regular basis is important to maintaining it. By broadcasting in indigenous languages, IRFA can make them public languages, reducing stigma and increasing usage to ensure their survival. They have also begun technical education programs in these communities, utilizing community gathering spaces rather than the radio to train participants in agriculture, cheese production, basic accounting, and more. In both of these projects, Fe y Alegría begins by asking, “What education do you want for your children?” Based on the answer, they work with the community to develop an appropriate plan.
LOOKING OUTWARD

“The teachers’ union is very strong here. It is difficult to demand a change or improvement. This isn’t only in Bolivia, but also in Mexico and the United States. Teachers have ceased to be just those with a vocation for education and have started to become a political force.”

– Fr. Rafael Correa, S.J., national director of Fe y Alegría

Bolivia

What would it take for the successes of Fe y Alegría to be implemented effectively throughout Bolivia? On the one hand, the government has already taken steps to copy and spread Fe y Alegría’s programs. The Ministry of Education has followed the lead of Fe y Alegría with policy on three fronts: special education, vocational training, and attention to the poor. Still, effective implementation remains a dream due to government inaction and opposition by the teachers’ union. Many interviewees cited inadequate teacher training and union obstructionism as barriers to enacting reforms. The teaching force is conservative; many were educated under the models of the 1950s and are either unwilling or unable to adapt to new educational philosophies. Structural factors compound these problems. Teachers are guaranteed their salary for life, so many never retire. They work few hours so wages are low, and a vicious cycle prevents necessary increases in both hours and wages because fewer teachers would be hired. Corruption has been reduced but is still a factor in awarding teaching positions.

On the other hand, Fe y Alegría has successfully adapted to past changes in educational staffing. The Jesuits have increasingly fewer vocations every year. Where once there would have been many Jesuits in a school, there is now one, and in the future there may be single priests overseeing many schools and programs. Those men who do enter the order are more focused on specific communities, rather than the grand political projects of their predecessors. Fr. René Cardozo, S.J., director of the Jesuit Province of Bolivia, is optimistic about this shift. He says, “The new generations are more local and think from that local perspective, and they reflect better the reality of our country.” The Jesuit impact on the world is no longer the work of a few powerful, politically well-connected priests, but instead it has become the daily job of committed lay people like Silvana Gonzales, national manager of public action.

Public action is one of the newest areas of work for Fe y Alegría in Bolivia, and it has two main components. The first is training and partnership with civil society, especially student and community leaders, but also networking with other educational organizations and government offices, while the second is improving communication efforts, internally and externally. Silvana develops and maintains Fe y Alegría’s connections to school boards, nonprofits, corporations, the government, and the media for the purposes of improving their programs and expanding them in collaboration with other institutions. Public action aims to increase citizens’ and the government’s sense of responsibility for education, so that all individuals will understand what high quality education entails and will demand it for themselves and their children.

Silvana’s work with the media represents a challenge and an opportunity. She considers the media to be of extreme importance “because they are in absolutely everything” and can “bring us closer to the state.” The media is thus a tool that can be used to raise awareness of educational problems in Bolivia and promote Fe y Alegría’s solutions to those problems, but they also need to be trained to talk about education in a way that is respectful of students and addresses the real issues, on a sustained basis, rather than sporadically covering dramatic episodes such as teachers’ strikes. This shift needs to happen so that education can become a national priority. Silvana says, “I think the ultimate challenge is for civil society to assume that education is everyone’s responsibility and not believe that it is only the responsibility of the state or institutions like ours. And for that, everyone needs to be aware that all of us have to work, which means not just asking but also helping, and one helps based on what one knows.”

New tactics such as yearly walks in support of inclusive education advance this goal and encourage the public to “see it [inclusive education] in a positive light and identify with the cause.” These efforts are what help Fe y Alegría become more than just a successful educational organization: it is a force for societal transformation, serving as a model, advocate, and catalyst for improvements throughout the Bolivian educational system. One can look to the boarding schools run by the government that are based on the Yachay Wasis, or the incorporation of technical education into the Ley de Educación Avelino Sínani, or the efforts toward inclusive education to see how Fe y Alegría positively impacts the educational experience of all Bolivians.

Fe y Alegría remains hopeful for the future of Bolivian education. Silvana believes that “the hallmark of [Fe y Alegría] is to think of innovative things that haven’t been done but demand attention.” They are proud of their accomplishments in teacher education, administrative reform, and other imaginative, successful programs that have been adopted nationally. But until Bolivia finds a better way to train, hire, and pay its educators, reforms will be limited in their depth and breadth.
INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

CARMÍÑA DE LA CRUZ, NATIONAL ADVISOR FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION, FE Y ALEGRIÁ BOLIVIA

What kind of role does faith play in these special education programs?

We try to focus on disability and our schools with awareness activities, through education in values. The word of God speaks about diversity, believes in the potential of people, and also provides positive values such as inclusion, respect, friendship, and solidarity. It’s not that straightforward, but values education in regular schools does play an important role in sensitizing people. Since the approach of the Church in the past was more of a welfare model, we have to be careful with this issue, that they’re not those “poor little things.” They can grow and develop.

In terms of your education and transformation in how you see this issue, did your faith or the Jesuit charism play a role?

Of course. I’m Catholic, I believe in the God who believes in all people. The work I am doing is a service job, and certainly what I’m doing now is a bit for this transformation. I know God is with me and gives me strength to put it like this, so that people understand me. Spiritual nourishment is what keeps me going and allows me to move on. Some people say, “When I go to a special education school, I get depressed.” I go to a center and leave happy, because I share with the people, although there are difficult conditions. Emotionally it is hard, but there is the strength that God gives me.

DON ENRIQUE, PARENT OF A YACHAY WASI STUDENT, YATIQAÑ UTA, TRINIDAD PAMPA, BOLIVIA

For you, how important is education?

It is of paramount importance. It is essential, principal. Education has changed our lives; people lived differently before. Now, education and training are the most important things. Education can help everyone; it can change the story of their life. It also helps with food and clothing. All the sacrifices we make, to buy things, it’s all for education.

What do you think of the influence of the Jesuits in this institution, and how important is that?

The Jesuit brothers have come to teach good things here, like religion and the gospel of the Bible. They have also talked about living well. Respect for people, care for the person, that’s what they say. Do not use drugs, alcohol, those things. It’s good, what the Jesuits bring.

Roxana Lovera Villarroel: Like Maria said, we mainly work with school communities: students, teachers, and parents. While working in services, we also work in projects aimed at improving the quality of education. One of the important projects is called Democracy and Gender Equity. In this project, the aim was to work toward a democratic climate in classrooms. A diagnosis determined that there were issues of participation, communication, and discrimination in schools. From this, we generated materials that are called learning modules. Strategies are based on the curriculum areas, such as math, language, and communication; teachers

MARIA LUCY Y NAVA AND ROXANA LOVERA VILLARROEL, MULTI-SERVICE EDUCATIONAL CENTER (CEMSE), LA PAZ, BOLIVIA

What does CEMSE do?

Before, fifty years ago, there was no school. We grew up with no school, only primary education. We have learned to read and write. Our approach was to learn by talking to people. In some parts, there is still no school.

What kind of education did you have growing up?

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develop their own materials, but besides teaching their area, they insert the cross-cutting issues of democracy and gender equality. What they do in the classroom is to promote greater participation of the students, so that you not only have a better climate in the classroom, but also gradually eliminate these factors of exclusion and discrimination.

We’ve also been working on the issue of inclusive education. We come at it from the perspective of multiculturalism, equity, and the exercise of human rights, always trying to create strategies and innovations that make these educational communities models for success. We aim for schools where there’s greater participation; where elements of the students’ own cultures are introduced; where there is less inequality between men and women; and where students and teachers will take ownership of the exercise of human rights.

Another important project is entrepreneurship. This arises from the need to develop, first, in the students skills that have to do with entrepreneurship. We know that often the only options for students are universities. But in these universities, very few students have access, especially from the public schools and rural areas where we work. And if they do go, only a small percentage manages to complete their studies. They get frustrated. So, you need to develop other skills such as entrepreneurship, to make students also have a life plan that’s not only directed toward higher education, but one that allows them to see other options for personal growth, leisure, and other ways to generate revenue and continue studying. This material we have is called The Life Project and Entrepreneurship. As Maria said, our materials come out of the work we do with teachers and students. We try to systematize our experiences, so that other teachers may apply them.

Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Maria Lucu y Nava: We also have a four-year-old project, where youth volunteers do community service. The main idea is to train children with certain Christian values, with the model of Christ’s life. It is part of a series of multi-issue workshops, for awareness, and then these groups do social action projects that they have to plan. For example, they choose a daycare, or an elderly home. By working with faculty, they establish links with these institutions so they can go and help. The project is small but it has great results in terms of the awareness of the participants.

We have it in La Paz and El Alto. There are a hundred high school youth who do this work every year. They have gone to education centers for children with special needs, make friends, and, along with their teachers, have experienced emotional growth through this.

FR. RENE CARDOZO, S.J., DIRECTOR OF THE BOLIVIAN JESUIT PROVINCE, LA PAZ, BOLIVIA

To get more into the educational programs of the Company, in your opinion, how do human-Christian values enter the picture?

Very much! We don’t give just a classical education. It’s not just knowledge and pragmatism. We want a more humane and humanizing education, to sensitize the spirit of the people for a more just, fraternal, and humane society, for a better life. The Company’s proposal is that it does not want to impose this. What we want is to awaken this in people, to awaken their critical, constructive, purposeful values and principles. It is an education that enlightens you to these concerns; it’s not passive. It is a philosophy diametrically opposed to the banking model, in which the student goes just to listen and is passive.

What are the elements needed to make education a mechanism for social justice?

I think the challenge there, on one level, is that education can be used in different ways. It is usually used to indoctrinate people. That’s not so good; it’s just message transmission. It may also be that the government says it wants to form their own people’s critical capacity; it’s possible to say no, I want people to think, not only to think like me.

Do the Jesuits, not just the students, get involved in politics or not so much?

The company itself has had a big impact in politics. But when you talk about new generations, it may be less. We are now in a process in which lay people are gaining more prominence in the Church itself. The new generations are more in the line of duty, almost anonymous, simple and unnoticed.

MAGDA AGUIRRE CUERVAS, NATIONAL MANAGER FOR JOB TRAINING, FE Y ALEGRIA BOLIVIA

Is there a values component in the job training program?

Yes. Technical education in Bolivia is not highly valued, and has been more focused in the job itself—teaching sewing, cutting, welding, fixing cars, etc. But in Fe y Alegria, values are important. The state curriculum is based on knowledge. The “plus” that Fe y Alegria adds is the formation of values, but we have great difficulties. It can be written very nicely, but you need to teach values through actions. For example, if the teacher talks about punctuality but is late, that cancels...
out all that they taught.

We are currently coordinating with the technical center staff and the education in values staff, to strengthen this institutional identity and to do this type of formation in our centers. We live the subject of values, but it’s still not very formalized or pedagogical. We need to be more intentional. Companies ask us to teach values: honesty, punctuality, and respect, which are very important values at work. With adults, it is very difficult to change their behaviors, but we always sow these values in our students, and sometimes we reap something.

To return to politics, what do you think in general of the educational policies of recent years?

In the area where I work, it’s spectacular that they’re reviving the technical aspect of education. Today the law says you have to do technical education. It is very important because in this country there are more people with university degrees, but we don’t have enough people that can do the execution, the technical part of a project. College students are often more theoretical but the builder can look at something and say, “This isn’t going to work.” For us in this area, this policy is essential. We are opening many doors, we are regularizing the centers, and we’re working towards higher quality training.

The law also rescues indigenous knowledge. People in the country can come out and say, “Today I will not plant potatoes because they won’t turn out well.” I, with five years in agronomy, would not be taught how to do that, but it’s native knowledge and should be revived. It’s an attempt to mix water with oil, but it is interesting that this is the law now.

In general education, things are changing so you have to unlearn to learn, but in our area, everything is new so the law is convenient. The only thing that is hard is to make the women in technical training understand the importance of academics. They have to get their degrees, but they don’t want to. They have left school for many reasons, and think if I’m learning to make skirts, why do I need to learn math? It should be taught through application, so that it’s more concrete.
Masha Goncharova is a junior in Georgetown College. Originally from Moscow, Russia, Masha immigrated to California when she was seven years old, though she returns to Russia with her family each year. During the summer of 2012, Masha traveled to Paris to connect with a different group of Russian émigrés—those who fled the Bolshevik revolution. Unlike the post-perestroika emigrants, these Parisian white émigrés have sustained an intimate expatriate community. Masha conducted interviews with a wide range of émigrés and their families in order to understand the role of religious education in preserving the group identity of white Russian émigrés through Orthodox schools, seminaries, and an extensive network of youth summer camps.

**PARTNER INSTITUTION: ACER-MJO (ACTION CHRÉTIENNE DES ÉTUDIANTS RUSSES — MOUVEMENT DE JEUNESSE ORTHODOXE) PARIS, FRANCE**

ACER-MJO (Action Chrétienne des Étudiants Russes — Mouvement de Jeunesse orthodoxe) is a Russian Orthodox youth movement in France. Its aim is to gather young Orthodox Christians from all nationalities and jurisdictions, to help them to deepen their faith, and to bring them to live in Christ at the service of the Church. Its members are drawn from Western Europe, particularly from France. ACER offers programs for children, teenagers, students, and adults. The youth section organizes a camp each summer, welcoming nearly 200 children to La Servagere in the French Alps. ACER-MJO works closely with ACER-Russie, a fundraising program for helping poor and hungry Orthodox children in Russia. ACER also partners with YMCA-PRESS publishing house to transmit Russian religious and philosophical texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ACER-MJO also participates in pan-orthodox organizations such as Syndesmos, a conference of European orthodox youth, and the Orthodox Fellowship in Western Europe.

**INTRODUCTION**

*We believe that having access to culture is to have access to God, and to understand others.*
— Cyrille Sollogoub, President of ACER youth group
The White Russian émigré experience is the story of spiritual preservation as a base for cultural identity. Five generations of exile gave rise to a group of Russians known today as the White émigrés—the descendants of the intellectual, political, and financial leaders who built and sustained imperial Russia and ultimately were condemned to bitter political exile during the Bolshevik revolution. In the émigré community in France, education has played an integral role in helping these political exiles sustain their faith in the Church and in themselves—they survived poverty, social humiliation, and the loss of a spiritual and material homeland. The commitment to social justice that accompanied their religious education composes the fabric that weaves together this community: Russian Orthodoxy and its fundamental teaching Zakhon Bozhii, or the Law of God.

A calling to preserve Russian Orthodoxy—the faith at the core of Russian identity and the religion that the Bolsheviks obliterated from its mother country—led the émigrés to the intersection of education and social justice. In imperial Russia, where Russian Orthodoxy was the official religion, virtually all children studied the Law of God. Once in exile, the émigrés sought recourse in the principles of justice, peace, and fairness embodied in the Law of God and formed schools and youth groups around the themes of this course.

Originally, the Law of God in these makeshift Russian Orthodox schools served a practical function: providing education to children of émigrés who had been denied French citizenship, and thereby French schooling, until the 1950s. It soon became clear that religious education, particularly the Law of God, reared émigré children into a fundamentally Russian Orthodox way of life—namely that one must live to be close to God. Russian Orthodox schools became the bedrock of émigré faith. Growing up surrounded by friends and family speaking Russian, praying in Russian, and discussing Russian literature and history brought up generation after generation under a moral and spiritual foundation. As a result, many Russian émigré children and teenagers today live fiercely religious lives, participate in Franco-Russian Orthodox “camps,” and appear distinctly more aware of their past than average French teens.

This report will examine how social justice, understood here as preserving dignity and cultural identity for the Russian émigrés, emerged from the religious education that has kept this community intact for over six generations. The report will consider three Russian youth educational groups in France—ACER, Scouts and Vitiaz—who have formed distinct visions of what it means to be a Russian émigré living in France. Their varying contemporary approaches to their religious and cultural identity reflects a critical moment in White émigré France: the future role of education and the Law of God in preserving this group’s irreplaceable ties to a moment in history.

LIVING IN THE MEMORY OF A CULTURE BASED IN FAITH

“When my father moved here he washed windows—he literally arrived in Paris in his White Russian military uniform and washed windows. It was his uniform that abandoned him; he never abandoned the uniform.”

– Maria Dmitrivna Ivanova, former director of the Alexander Nevsky Russian school

During the first years of exile, the Russian émigrés hopscotched hotels and cheap apartments. Nobody expected permanent exile, but an uncertainty about the length of their exile deterred their return. The reality of a socialist Russia shocked virtually everyone. Reluctantly accepting lasting exile, they built a community based on the faith that had sustained their moral and spiritual integrity in France: the Russian Orthodox Church. Religion became the émigrés’ source of justice and equality in the unjust circumstances they faced: refusal of employment in their former professions, disrespect, poverty, and the loss of nearly all of their Russian property and possessions.

The Alexander Nevsky Church became a haven away from the injustice that accompanies political exile. “When the workday was over, they would put on their old uniforms or their nicest piece of clothing and go to this cathedral [the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral]. They tried to forget their hardships and again become their old selves. They came back to their Russia when they came here. They got together…and created imaginary plans to return. They were in a bad situation, though, in reality; they had to run from their homes,” recounts Elizaveta Sergeevna Obolenskaya, the current director of the Alexander Nevsky Russian school. Many émigrés found their source of spiritual and material sustainment in their Russian Orthodox education and by passing on the principles of the Law of God to their children.

The church community helped the émigrés rebuild their
hope through faith. Michel Bababaieff, a teacher of Russian literature at Lycée Henri IV, claims that rather than the French daily school, it was the Russian school that “taught me everything.” His ancestors overcame exile from the motherland by relinquishing many elements of their Russian heritage—save their Russian Orthodox faith. Like many émigrés who felt betrayed and abandoned by Russia proper, Bababaieff’s ancestors viewed the Russian Orthodox school as their son’s connection to the spiritual faith that had enabled them to survive abroad—not as a tie to their former national identity. Bababaieff acknowledged, “Life moves on; they became French. But they didn’t want to hear anything about Russia. ... Maybe they went to see a movie and read Russian books once in a while, and they still spoke in Russian, but they felt abandoned by the country.”

In this abandonment, the Law of God played a significant role in bringing a sense of deeper purpose to the émigrés’ exile. Fr. Alexandre Kedroff, archdeacon of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, believes that the émigrés’ renewed interest in service to the Church and living by the Law of God inspired the revitalization of Russian culture abroad. Kedroff believes that the émigré experience led to the flourishing of Russian Orthodox culture in the West.

Embracing the Law of God, the émigrés in France lived lives for social justice parallel to the work done by Jesuits or Catholics. They “felt that God laid out the path to the West like an apostle-like mission. There were many writers, poets, who were all concerned with religion. This occupied their activity during periods of hardship. We could say that their impoverished situation in Paris resulted in the birth of great talent,” said Kedroff. The talent among these famous émigrés—writers, musicians, politicians—found Russian Orthodox expression through the church school, which émigré children attended once or twice each week.

Funding from charitable organizations like the YMCA enabled the émigré community to rent spaces for schools, set up children’s summer camps, and even establish their own Russian-language printing press. In 1923 Sergei Rachmaninoff, along with other iconic artists of imperial Russia, founded the Rachmaninoff Russian Musical Conservatory of Paris. A Russian-language gymnasium (primary school) was established in 1925 for children with refugee status who were not granted access to the French educational system until the 1950s. In 1933 Antonina Mikhailovna Óssorguino started an Orthodox Russian school on Thursdays, when the gymnasium closed, dedicated to religious education. There she taught, besides Russian history and literature, the Law of God.

The formal Law of God course is the bedrock of Russian religious education. Before the Revolution, Russian Orthodox children learned to live by “Church Law,” or the Law of God. This course teaches children about equality in the family and focuses on respect of the elderly and among peers. The Law of God is the law of equals—people live by God’s law in the family and live with a clean spirit. Under the Law of God, humans strive to be closer to God and in doing so serve the Church and engage to promote dignity and equality in their communities. The émigrés preserved the Law of God course and by it engaged in social justice work based on the sanctity of life and dignity of every human being.

Today the émigrés continue to prioritize religious and social education despite their limited financial means. Elizaveta Obolenskaya, the current director of the Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox school, one of the few left who teaches the course, recounts that White émigrés placed enormous value on Russian Orthodox education for their children: “they would never dare ask for [financial] help. This was the Russian school and they respected and supported it to that degree. For the White immigration the Russian school was something very, very, very important because it transmitted Russian culture to their children and grandchildren.” Older émigré students enrolled in the St. Serge Theological Institute. The institute housed those children from the first and second waves of emigration who, despite living in France, socialized exclusively with Russians through the religious, musical, and academic circles they formed. Nicolas Cernocrack, the current Dean of St. Serge, proudly claims, “our whole Russian émigré population in Western Europe came through this institute at one time or another.”

In addition to serving the Church directly, the émigrés also published in Russian through the YMCA press run by Nikita Alexeevich Struve. Even famous émigré authors such as Ivan Bunin or Boris Zaitsev published with the lovingly-pronounced “imka” (the sound of y-m-c-a in Russian). In their spare time, many émigrés worked on church texts, prayer books and songbooks—not only in Russian but also in French translation. Through religious education emerged a musical, literary, and linguistic tradition that proclaimed the continued life of Russian émigrés’ through church service and living closer to God.

As the émigrés watched in dismay the spiritual disintegration of Soviet Russia, they held on tightly to the new citadel of Russian Orthodox culture in France. The tenants of the Law of God—social justice, fairness, equality, personal dignity, and a desire to be close to God—became cornerstones of the émigré lifestyle. The
schools and publications that have survived until today attest to their deeply rooted connection to the church. Yet as newer generations of émigrés assimilate into Western culture, they mentally distance themselves from their former motherland.

MENTALLY MOVING AWAY FROM RUSSIA, BUT CLOSER TO ORTHODOXY

“I used to think that they were exaggerating when they said that the mentality of post-1917 Russia is not the same. But it’s true. Those people were simply raised differently.”

– Michel Baibabaeff, Russian literature professor at Lycée Henri IV

Coming to grips with the loss of their Russian homeland confirmed the émigrés’ settlement in France and posed a question about the future of their communities. The assimilation generated a duty to preserve the religion that had saved them, and the traditional education of their children in the Law of God that had so positively contributed to their community.

Michel Baibabaeff grew up in the outskirts of Paris in the fifteenth arrondissement. His parents struggled to make ends meet; his mother died when he was nine years old, his father, when he was seventeen. Michel’s larger émigré family expanded to nearly half of his apartment building, to which émigrés flocked for its cheap housing. Two Russian Orthodox churches sprang up in the neighborhood, in addition to many more makeshift churches composed of the émigrés’ personal icons. Michel’s Russian school was located across the street from his apartment and became his second home. His teachers were former St. Petersburg professors or master pedagogues. They related the illustrious history of Peter the Great and imperial Russia. But the history lessons stopped at 1917. The injustice felt so strongly by the émigré community encouraged them to pass over this part of their history still wrought with negative emotions. In this respect, the émigrés have used education for a distinct sort of social justice, to clear their name and tell their story to their offspring. The consequences of this approach to education appeared later in Michel’s life.

When Michel grew up, he received a fellowship to visit Russia. His Russian Orthodox schooling brought him up to believe in an idealized Russian imperial history. This émigré ideal contradicted the Soviet reality, one which Bababaieff faced once he landed in the USSR. “They were very rude to us… but I felt it even more, because when I was growing up I had idealized Russia… All the people I met in real Russia were very unsympathetic. I didn’t have any friends or family in what was supposed to be my homeland. I just arrived and walked like a fool around that idiotic Nevsky Prospect.”

The émigré perspective on their Russian heritage distanced them from post-1917 Russia, and placed them into their new religious context in the West.

Many émigrés found their mission abroad to witness Russian Orthodoxy in the West. They viewed their social justice work as spreading Orthodoxy into a culture unfamiliar with its elaborate music, procedures, and beliefs. Alexandre Kedroff, current archdeacon of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, formed a musical group following the example of his father, the famous Nicolai Kedroff. Nicolai had been the founder of the Kedroff Quartet, which sang in the Malii Zal of the St. Petersburg Philharmonia for Emperor Nicolas II. When Nicolai fled to Paris he took his music with him and continued to play and teach music to émigrés. In the Kedroffs’ case, transmitting culture is inextricably linked to religion—the Church became the citadel of Russian culture turned Western. Father Kedroff believes that Russians have
the unique ability to “take the instruments of Western culture and make them Russian.”

Perhaps the most valuable instrument for transmitting religious and cultural teaching was language. The waning use of Russian in schools, prayers, youth group meetings, or camp outings carried heavy implications for higher institutions dedicated to the Russian Orthodox faith. In the 1970s, the St. Serge Theological Institute became francophone. The current Dean Nicolas Cernocrack believes that the decreasing number of students who spoke Russian necessitated this decision. “They didn’t speak Russian. We needed to open ourselves up to the French. The institute does remain truly in spirit what it was at the very start—the Orthodox experience of theology and religion, even though it functions through the French language.”

Literary and theologian families followed suit in this process of linguistic westernization. Cyrille Sollogoub, president of ACER, believes that the White émigré movement westward embodies a natural franconization. He recounts that even in their St. Petersburg lives, the émigrés were keenly in tune with the French language and European culture. In Paris, Sollogoub believes that the Orthodox faith outweighed Russian nationality. For Sollogoub, the “goal is to put service [to the Church] before anything else, including to Russian culture. There was a moment in our history when we realized that for us, the most important is our Orthodox belief.” Today, this service to the church is most prominently illuminated in youth movements.

**YOUTH SPIRIT AND FAITH IN THE LAW OF GOD**

*Even though maybe they don’t understand all of the words or details of the language, they understand the meaning behind it…Without the family culture and growing up to understand Russia, the kids would not be who and how they are.*

– Natalia Sergeevna Filatova, history teacher at the Alexander Nevsky Russian school

As the Law of God teaching took root in Western soil, its connection to Russia has become open to interpretation. Today many descendants of the first émigré wave question whether their faith still requires a connection to the Russian culture. The concept of ‘living to be closer to God’ has separated itself from the notion of Russian national identity, and the Law of God so fundamental to Russian culture has now drawn itself under the umbrella of religion. The youth today, despite their fervent Russian Orthodox faith, do not view it as their duty to preserve a lost Russian culture that so betrayed and hurt their ancestors.

The group ACER-MJO (Action Chretienne des Étudiants Russes — Mouvement de Jeunesse orthodoxe or the Christian Russian Student Movement) has actively engaged the European émigrés since its conception in the early 1900s. It is considered the leading westernizing force among French émigré youth groups. Presently their most popular event is the annual summer camp run by former campers-turned-counselors.

One counselor, Anastassia Didour, is an anomaly among the others, most of whom are fourth-, fifth- or sixth-generation descendants of the first-wave émigrés. Anastassia was born in Russia and joined the ACER youth group when she moved to France in elementary school. Now, 10 years later, Anastassia speaks Russian while the other counselors do not. She has been to Russia, while most of the counselors have not. And yet despite her linguistic and cultural ties to Russia, growing up among the first-wave émigrés alienated her from their Russia.

“When I was a kid, I felt that [ACER] was a ‘family camp,’” she said. “All of the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of these White Russian [counselors] went here. There’s even a tradition of meeting future husbands or wives through this camp. And when you don’t have this big family or famous ancestors, and your family wasn’t full of princes and aristocracy, you definitely feel [isolated], even if it’s not directly stated. … You see [the counselors’] extremely tight knit community that they’ve preserved for these generations and know you don’t necessarily fit into the family.”

Anastassia’s parents represent the second and third waves of emigration fleeing Stalin or post-World War Two Russia. As they joined the first wave of émigrés in France, they were introduced officially to the Law of God that had been absent from their Soviet upbringing. It was thus that being Russian from post-1917 Russia isolated Anastassia from the White émigré counterparts. For descendants of the first wave, Anastassia’s religion was her only connection to their organization.

Linguistically, this has taken a toll on how émigré descendants conduct their meetings, prayers, and classes, including the Law of God. Basile Nicosky, a White Russian descendent who recently graduated from camper to counselor, asserted, “in fact, we are French, and we do have Russian roots, but we also have French roots. And the fact of the matter today is that not everyone still speaks Russian, and it’s not even the parents necessarily speak Russian. If we are French, we will speak French.” Maintaining the language depends more on academic interest than cultural imperative. According to Vladimir
Yagello, a theologian and teacher in the Alexander Nevsky school, “before émigré children would take the Russian language exam during the Baccalaureate as their first language. Now nobody takes that exam. Or if they do, they’ll take it as their third language … In order to teach the language to the children who were born in France, one needs a lot of effort, attention and knowledge.”

Money is also a challenge as current Russian schools in France attempt to maintain and integrate language classes into the religious teachings. New émigrés mostly come from Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldavia, and other former Soviet satellite states. It is not uncommon for them to expect help in funding their children’s education. But the first-wave émigrés now must incorporate their teachings of the Law of God to new Russians who speak the language but understand very little of the religious history. Although émigré schools welcome anyone interested in learning more about Russian Orthodoxy, funding does not seem to be an integral part of their social justice mission, as it probably would be in a Catholic or Jesuit setting. Scholarships are available, but on a lesser scale. For instance, the St. Serge institute provides only a limited number of student fellowships. Current Dean Nicolas Cernocrack explains that the “pattern nowadays is that more of those who come from Russia and other countries ask for money.” This year, the institute is funding two students, one from Moscow and another from Ukraine.

Similar issues confront the Alexander Nevsky School. Elizaveta Sergeevna Obolenskaya, the current director, insists that Russian education should be available to all. She refuses to deny any child an education. But the historical trend from the school’s founding to present days illustrates a growing contradiction: Russian Orthodox education is less respected but more needed among Russians émigrés today. In the beginning of their exile, White émigré parents prized the Alexander Nevsky School. Its existence represented the transfer of their culture. Rather than paying formal school tuition, parents contributed to the school’s electricity and rent bills. All teachers were volunteers. Former director Maria Dmitrivna Ivanova recalls that the financial situation for the first wave of émigrés was “so much worse! People who come here now do not have reason to. Nobody in Russia is killing them or locking them in prisons. Those who come here from Ukraine, yes, they come from hunger. It’s difficult over there—but there is no risk of life, like there was when our children came.”

Current Director Elizaveta Sergeevna acknowledges that it is a challenge for the Alexander Nevsky School to receive any sort of payment at all. “Before, actually, even though most parents had serious financial difficulties, they would never dare ask for help… But, I find that now émigrés from Russia or Ukraine or Georgia or Belarus ask for help because they don’t want to pay for school. They don’t yet have housing here or anything. They ask for discounts or waivers. Besides financing the schools, teachers themselves are facing cultural instability in the classroom. A motley group of children—the first emigration fleeing the Bolsheviks, the second emigration fleeing Stalin, and the third wave of emigration leaving contemporary Russia—must reconcile their extremely distinct family backgrounds and understandings of Russia. Often, this means learning a history that contradicts their parents’ accounts. For history teacher Natalya Sergeevna Filatova, such a melting pot of students stalls progress in the classroom. “They have different levels of Russian language and very different family cultures. The problem is that, although our classes are small, the level of Russian of each student is extremely varied. Sometimes a 10- or 11-year-old student will enter the school mid-year, but he doesn’t know how to write at all.”

Teachers like Filatova also work with students on plays or skits after school. “What I really, truly appreciate about these kids is that, without words, on an instinctual, basic cultural level, they really understand Russian.” For this year’s after school project, she wrote and directed a play about the émigré experience. The students performed in their grandparents’ White Army uniforms and recited poems and prose about the anguish and pride of White Russians. As Obolenskaya presented me with the DVD, pride flowed from her description: “It is amateur theater, of course, they were not pretending to be professionals. But how well they tried to understand what it was, the immigration, and how they learned their lines! It is so touching!”

The teachers and students learning the Law of God stand as a testament to the expanded role of education in the context of social justice for diaspora communities abroad. Teachers educated in the USSR have a difficult time connecting to students whose parents and grandparents fiercely opposed that regime. As the community comes to terms with its unique and motley group of members, the tenants of the Law of God such as equality and dignity become ever-important. The key that links together an increasingly varying group of émigrés is the social equality and preservation of cultural identity within church schools and youth groups. But, as Section II explores, perhaps the youth groups have begun to segregate to a point of fragmentation within the émigré community.
SUBGROUPS WITHIN THE RUSSIAN ÉMIGRÉ COMMUNITY

This is also very typical of the Russian émigré community—they socialize among themselves in these summer camps and at church. Then they marry among themselves.

– Cyrille Sollogoub, president of ACER-MJO

The evolution of student youth movements indicates the role of education in social milieus as means of transmitting one particular take on the émigrés’ connection to Russia. The three subgroups studied in this project each have different relationships towards Russia and practice Orthodoxy in varying degrees of Westernization. Their understanding of what is socially just for the community has begun to splinter. “My own parents were deeply committed to this program when they were little. They actually met at an ACER summer camp. This is also very typical of the Russian émigré community—they socialize among themselves in these summer camps and at church. Then they marry among themselves. Both of my parents are from this movement, so they both were at first campers, then they became camp counselors,” explains Cyrille Sollogoub, president of the ACER Orthodox youth group. Since childhood, Cyrille has been involved with ACER—in Russian, Российское Студенческое Христианское Движение (РСХД); in French, Action Chrétienne des Étudiants Russes-Mouvement de Jeunesse orthodoxe (ACER-MJO); and in English, the Christian Russian Student Movement. The scope of activities that this group offers—from a printing press to a youth camp to a yarmarka, or yard sale—reflects the tradition of engagement exclusively within one particular group, such as ACER, throughout multiple generations.

The division among youth groups in France occurred very early in émigré history. Between 1920 and 1930, as the émigrés realized the permanence of their exile, they consolidated into closer circles. Three groups in particular—ACER, the Scouts, and Vitiaz—remain highly influential. ACER is the most “francophile” of the three groups. Founded in 1923, it aims to promote and serve Russian Orthodoxy abroad. ACER members learn the tenants of the Law of God in an environment that also embraces Western culture. Thirty years ago, the group decided to transition completely to the French language. This move caused commotion among émigré circles, as Cyrille recalls. “There were, of course, problems, discussions, and disputes and dialogues—what is more important, to pray in Russian or in French? But we did overcome this crisis. This is all behind us now, thankfully. Now, it is important to move forward, not forgetting our Russian roots. … We believe that having access to culture is to have access to God, and to understand others.”

ACER, although formally pro-Western, remains active in Russia indirectly through social justice work. The ACER-Russie program donates funds to help impoverished and hungry children in Russia. Current partnerships are with Saint-Iossaff and Upsala Tsirk in St Petersburg, Miloserdie Detiam in Moscow, and the Paroisse de Kondopoga in Carelie. Russian children suffering from tuberculosis or malnutrition in these centers receive ACER’s funding in the form of nutritional programs. ACER generates these funds through the performances of the Volga choir, balalaika concerts, and most prominently through the bi-annual yarmarka, or yard sale.

Some members of ACER do take interest in Russia, for instance Alexei von Rosenschild. Currently Alexei is pursuing a degree in engineering at Baumanski Technical Institute in Moscow. On the weekends he explores the cultural life of the
city, seeing Russian museums and plays—not necessarily just those of playwrights and artists from the imperial era. Before his first year at Baumanski, he described how he was nervous but excited to live in the country that has so evolved since his ancestors had last stepped foot on its soil. “I have always wanted to live in Russia. There is a small part of me that is nervous to go. But when I visited last summer, I realized how interesting it is to be Russian in Russia. I think that people there will look at me like a French person in Russia. This saddens me, but I am prepared for it.”

Alexei’s example stands as a testament to some émigrés’ commitment to the Russian culture behind the Russian Orthodox religion. His vision of social justice reflects that of the first wave of émigrés who continued to intend to return to the empire they helped to build. His understanding of Russia expands the “motherland” to include the changes that Russia has undergone in the past 100 years.

The Scouts is the Orthodox youth group that establishes a middle ground between pro-Western and pro-Russian identity. Formed in 1920, the Scouts’ mission is to retain culture and religion together with a focus on service. Marie and Vasilissa Kedroff have been involved in the Scouts since age six. “They teach us Russian, we sing songs in Russian, learn about our ancestors, we study the law of God.” Both sisters feel as if their identities are somewhere in the middle, because their youth group does not enforce a particular mindset. Marie and Vasilissa both plan to pursue careers as translators in French and Russian, but unlike Alexei, neither sister has serious plans to live in Russia as adults. Marie even feels a mix of hesitation and curiosity about her one-year study abroad requirement. “I would maybe want to go for a year. Actually this is a requirement for my university translator’s degree. I absolutely don’t know what life is like over there, so I’m not sure.”

The most russophile youth Orthodox group is Vitiaz, formed in 1934. Maria Dmitrovna Ivanova, former director of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, attended the camp during her childhood, served as the camp’s leader, and met her closest friends there. Vitiaz insists that the connection to Russia must remain strong. “Yes, ACER is much more French-speaking than us. They were very intent on opening themselves to the West. But we, Vitiaz, had a different vision for the White movement—our founder himself was fighting against the Bolsheviks. He fought against those who literally killed Russia—killed Russia morally and physically. He was dealing with this and was devoted to the cause of not forgetting the Russia that was absolutely killed by the Bolsheviks.” Twenty years ago Vitiaz founded the Vitiaz Association in Russia. Today they have established five summer camps in Russia, mostly in St. Petersburg, Irkutsk, and Lower Novgorod. The president, Vladimir Yagello, used to be the summer camp leader in their French location just outside of Paris. Today, his daughter Natasha runs the camp.

ACER, the Scouts, and Vitiaz, though distinct in details, find themselves inevitably drawn together in the common goal of educating the coming generations about Russian Orthodoxy. Today, as Russia witnesses a resurgence of the Orthodox faith, there is no threat of its disappearance if the émigrés do not preserve it abroad. The danger of disappearance now lies solely in the imperial culture that these fifth- and sixth-generation émigrés have inherited. Their decision about whether to preserve their cultural ties to Imperial Russia remain largely based on which youth group they belong to—that is, which group their parents belong to, ACER, Vitiaz, or Scouts. The rather automatic transition toward a particular viewpoint of course has its exceptions—such as Alesha, a member of the Western ACER who chose to attend university in Moscow. But with future generations, without Russian language and a nearly pure Franco-Russian Orthodox tradition established, there is a relatively realistic chance that the imperial Russian culture they have inherited will soon disappear altogether.

CONTINUING TO REBUILD HOPE THROUGH FAITH

The Russian Orthodox faith is as the bedrock of the émigré community in France. Religious schools, youth groups, and camps have enabled the émigrés to transmit the language of God through courses as Zakhon Bozhii, or the Law of God. The Orthodox culture of living to be closer to God and serving the Church has become engrained into émigré mindset. Marie and Vasilissa both plan to pursue careers as translators in French and Russian, but unlike Alexei, neither sister has serious plans to live in Russia as adults. Marie even feels a mix of hesitation and curiosity about her one-year study abroad requirement. “I would maybe want to go for a year. Actually this is a requirement for my university translator’s degree. I absolutely don’t know what life is like over there, so I’m not sure.”

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INTerview Excerpts

ALEXANDER KEDROFF, ARCHDEACON OF ALEXANDER NEVSKY CATHEDRAL, PARIS, FRANCE

What role did Orthodoxy play in the émigré experience?

In essence, the Orthodox Church became admired and interesting to the Western world in part by the work of the Russian émigrés, and the culture that developed in the diaspora and immigration to Paris. There was, in Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, beautiful worship. Metropolitan Evlogii was very smart and a great administrator. Every Sunday there were so many people, the church was full—not only inside the church, but spilling out into the street there were packs of people. This was a process of consolidating these Russians through their faith. At that point, their material depravity and distance from their homeland both developed and concentrated their spirit in the church. Here the cathedral played the central role. They wanted to continue and keep alive their culture here through the St. Serge Institute, through publications like YMCA press published by Nikita Alexseevich Struve.

But I do see that for a long time the emigrations had the spiritual understanding that Orthodoxy was part of our mission. In their spare time, Russian émigrés began to work on church texts, publishing church textbooks for children, and not only in Russian, but also in French. They felt that God laid out the path to the West like an apostle-like mission. There were many writers, poets, who were all concerned that religion is what occupied these active émigrés in the context of hardship. We could say that in Paris their situation resulted in the birth of great talent.

Cyrille SollogouB, President of ACER-MJO, PARIS, FRANCE

Do you see your organization, ACER-MJO, ever putting an emphasis in their teachings and events on their Russian cultural heritage, in addition to the Russian Orthodox faith?

This is a difficult question. Specifically in our movement, the most important from the very beginning was faith. We are Orthodox people rooted in the church. The church is the whole purpose of our life, and in the church we can find all the answers to our existential questions. This is actually a unique phenomenon among other Russian Orthodox groups of émigrés that have formed around Paris. But truly, all of the documents about the first émigrés from our movement do indeed report this. We are people of the church. We are responsible for the fate of the Orthodox faith in the West. Of course, we are all Russian in Paris. For us, it just wasn’t a question of being Russian that connected us, but rather our religion.

Today, through your programs like this summer camp, how do you think the kids today react to their identity as Russians?

The question of identity is a very challenging question. I would say that among our members, the outlooks are extremely varied. For some, their Russian identity means nothing. They are only Orthodox. For the first wave of émigrés, some have saved a bit of Russian culture in the family. Some try to speak in Russian, but this is a very large minority. Some don’t speak at all. We have a big diversity in this regard. But none of us forget our history. In fact we are proud of our history. After all, it is a beautiful page for the Russian émigré community. But we also understand that we take on responsibility for this heritage. Some, with a big interest, follow what is going on in Russian society and maintain francophone congregations, and we translate the services into French. In Paris we actually began ecumenical relations of mutual understanding between Christians, Catholics, Muslims, etc. And the fact that people value the Orthodox Church is completely new, because people had not seen the beauty of it for so long.
contacts in Russia. Some people even within ACER regularly travel there.

MARIE AND VASSILISSA KEDROFF, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND SOKOLI MEMBERS, PARIS, FRANCE

In your religious life, how do you feel living in Catholic France?

M. Kedroff: France is not Catholic anymore. There isn’t really any feeling of religious encroachment from the Catholics. Most French are atheists. The fact that we’re Orthodox doesn’t bother us, and in fact we’ve often noted that our Orthodoxy is so much stronger and more passionate than the current state of the Catholic faith.

V. Kedroff: Many of my friends are baptized, but they don’t believe in God. Catholics get baptized at birth, but don’t really believe or practice their religion. So our friends are non-believers, as are most in France, so it doesn’t bother our Orthodoxy at all.

Do the different Orthodox youth groups in Paris differ in their views toward the politics and society of Russia today?

M. Kedroff: There are many misunderstandings today. For instance, in l’ACER, which is the most Francophile of the organizations, they really criticize Russian politics. It’s because their very French perspective is fundamentally Western. They think like a Westerner thinks about Russian culture. But what can we call Russia? What do we understand about the place now? It doesn’t matter if you are in l’ACER or a Scout, our entire émigré community has a different understanding of what Russia is, because none of us really know what it’s like. I have this idealized picture of Russian people, and the beauty of the Russian land, but I know that this is just in my imagination from pictures in books before the revolution.

MICHIEL BAIBABAEFF, PROFESSOR OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE, Lycée Henri IV, PARIS, FRANCE

How do you reconcile your love for and tension with Russia?

I can’t relate to the Russia that exists now in any way; I’ve only been there twice. In 1974, and then when I met an artist in the 1980s, I got to visit him and meet some Russians related to him.

But I really can’t say anything about Russia.

What role did French education play in your life?

It certainly gave me access to two cultures. But on the other hand, I don’t have either culture. I’m not sure who I am. I don’t feel myself as a Frenchman at all. But I’m certainly not Russian either. Right away, Russians see that I’m not Russian. I only spoke in Russian when I was growing up. All of the literature before 1917 I knew, and of course it helped a lot for my university degree in Russian. I think it is thanks to this very Russian school where we sit that I achieved my diploma. Otherwise I would never have sustained the level necessary.

Your knowledge of Russian came entirely from this Russian school?

Here in this school, yes. The other Russian schools I don’t know about. When I was young there used to be one on Rue Petelle. I’m not sure if it exists still. Actually, we were told that there is one which is controlled by the Russian metropolitan, the Soviet one. So they told us never to interact with them. And they never come to us. Because the metropolitan was from the Soviet church. So in effect there are these sorts of clans, these sub-groups of Russian émigrés, who don’t really interact with one another. Let’s say they avoided one another. But that’s understandable, since there was a second wave of émigrés right after the Second
World War, and then a third wave arrived. Then there was an attempt to unite all of them, but it didn't work out.

ANASTASSIA DIDOUR, STUDENT, SCIENCES PO, AND CAMP LEADER, ACER-MHO, PARIS, FRANCE

During the camp counselor weekend we were at, something that came up quite frequently was the ‘Dostoyevskian questions’ and the particularity of the Russian soul. Do you discuss this often with your friends at the l’ACER camp?

Most of the people who go to this camp have become completely French: they were born here, grew up here, etc. But I think what makes this camp such a special place, and why I personally love it so much, is that there is this understanding of the Russian soul. You can’t describe the atmosphere, but we understand each other so much more. Orthodoxy gives us something, of course, but it is our Franco-Russianness that separates us, and definitely them (the fourth and fifth generation children) from the French. They are a [Russian] community within a [French] community. Most of us here love Dostoyevsky, and I think that this is because he accomplished the most important thing: he describes the Russian soul, which is really something you can’t describe, but he did. Maybe it’s that why they love him so much—not only the ACER group, but all immigrants are inclined to love his works.

What about the kids you have mentioned who don't speak Russian? How do you think they are able to connect to the Russian spirit?

Probably, thanks to Orthodoxy. They grew up in Orthodox traditions and education. Yes, it gives a serious impression on a person’s outlook and his personal life. Sometimes Orthodoxy is an inextricable part of the Russian spirit. For them, it’s Russian spirit in religion.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Michel Baibabaeff  
Teacher, Lycée Henri IV

Nikolas Cernocrack  
Dean of St. Serge Orthodox Seminary

Anastassia Didour  
University student and camp leader of the ACER Orthodox Youth Organization

Natalia Sergeevna Filatova  
Teacher, Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Russian School

Alexander Kedroff  
Archdeacon of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral and teacher, Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Russian School

Vassilissa Kedroff and Marie Kedroff  
University students and members of the Russian Scouts Orthodox Youth Organization

Maria Dmitrivana Ivanova  
Former Director, Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Russian School

Elizaveta Sergeevna Obolenskaya  
Director, Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Russian School

Nina Konstantinova Rausch de Traubenberg  
Retired psychologist and writer

Alexis von Rosenchild  
University student and camp leader of ACER Orthodox Youth Organization

Cyrille Sollogoub  
President of ACER-MHO Orthodox Youth Organization

Poline Tchoubar and Basile Nicolsky  
University students and camp leaders of the ACER Orthodox Youth Organization

Vladimir Yagello  
President of Vittaz Orthodox Youth Organization and teacher, Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Russian School


6. Ibid.


9. J. McMullen, P. O’Callaghan, J. Richards, J. Eakin, H. Rafferty, (2011), “Screening for Traumatic Exposure and Psychological Distress Among War-Affected Adolescents in Post-Conflict Northern Uganda”, Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology 47: 1489. This study measures the prevalence of psychological distress in war-affected adolescents four years after the end of the conflict. There was a cross-sectional study of 205 adolescents, aged 12–19, from a boarding primary school in Gulu, northern Uganda. A war experiences checklist was developed with the assistance of local professionals.


11. Youth Lucky Bosmic Otim created a song Peace Return Northern Uganda. The chorus is “Peace return, northern Uganda, peace return, is our prayer (repeat) / Prayer more in Juba, bear fruits is our prayer, peace talks in Juba, bear fruits is our prayer (repeat) / Peace return, northern Uganda, peace return, is our prayer (repeat)”.


22. This is the Aymara term, which is used here since Trinidad Pampa is predominantly Aymara. In other parts of the country, Fe y Alegría uses the Quechua name, Yachay Wasi.

23. The Aymara are the predominant indigenous group in Bolivia. Fe y Alegría also runs Yachay Wasis for Quechua populations in other regions of the country.
The education and social justice project: International summer research fellowships 2012
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3307 M Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20007
berkeleycenter@georgetown.edu
202-687-5119
http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu

Designed by Richa Goyal

To learn more about the Education and Social Justice Project, visit: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/esj.