



**Fe y Alegría**

# Challenges and new popular education frontiers in the XXI century

(Some insights and proposals to emphasise the challenges  
ahead, based on the countries' reflections) <sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Even though the pandemic has hit the most vulnerable populations with especial virulence, it has strengthened our creativity, promoted greater coordination among ourselves and with educational communities and it has strengthened our commitment to quality popular education. We are aware that popular education has to do not only with the subject of education, who are the most vulnerable, but also with the contents, which are based on their culture and needs; with its objective, which is to build a just society, without marginalisation and exclusion; and with a methodology that seeks to create mechanisms for dialogue and democratic participation.

This conception of popular education and our option to guarantee quality education for all, make us work in order to develop a new way of thinking about public education, which is not the one of the government, but the one of society, all society. When we talk about society nowadays, we are talking about a globalised society. And just as peace, migration and environmental protection are now considered global tasks, education must also become a responsibility shared by all societies. This is the meaning of Pope Francis' invitation to join the Global Pact for Education, an invitation that we welcome with enthusiasm.

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## I.- Beyond borders... What countries contribute

“Border” has become an emblematic word in today's world. We can see this in the amount of news on the media about rivers of people trying to cross the borders of Mexico to go to United States, or trying to cross the jungles of the Darien in Panama, or the desert in Chile, or the boats of Africans that get stranded in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea... And it is precisely with this word that we wanted to identify this Congress. A Congress that should lead us to rethink popular education in the new frontiers. It is up to us, then, to imagine that we are in that place, in that space in transit that limits, separates and unites two territories; to clarify where we are and where we should go when we cross the limit of our own territory.

And from there, teachers groups and directors of each national Fe y Alegría have been reflecting, during these long months of health crisis, on the first of the three themes that will be addressed in this Congress. Each country, from its own context, was observing where it was, its particular and current place, before looking beyond its borders searching for other horizons because they felt they needed to know what they could count on to make that journey to find out what is new and it is emerging in their borders.

As we reread the syntheses of these internal debates, we are configuring a cartography made of concerns, challenges and common certainties that constitute the pillars of Fe y Alegría.

To continue going in depth in our identity as educators of an Integral Popular Education Movement is a constant in most of the countries which sent the synthesis of their reflections around this first focus, because as Fe y Alegría Guatemala remarks "we belong to a history that strengthens our present" with the permanent commitment to "put on the table the degree of identity as popular educators" adds Fe y Alegría Ecuador. And this continuous work on the Movement's identity has to be done from the particularity of most of the educational centres in Latin America, as "public schools of private





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management", "an identity that part of the civil society and some State officials are unaware of" as Fe y Alegría Peru warns.

From these reflections emerge, therefore, the different internal frontiers through which Fe y Alegría must move in order to respond not only to its founding principles but also to the educational policies in force in each country. For example, in the face of the discourse of educational quality that is only measured through standardised tests, an alarm is set: do not lose our north, since it is important to "move the frontiers of injustice". From Fe y Alegría Chile we hear, then, the challenge of "building a shared sense of what quality means" within the movement that expresses "our concern for those who are left behind, for those who do not have guaranteed access or do not have access to the quality they deserve". It is time, then, we are told, "not to be clouded by results and not to leave out the socio-emotional development of students. It is important to seek a comprehensive development".

However, Fe y Alegría Paraguay warns us it is not an easy task, because "in relation to pedagogical action, the popular education of Fe y Alegría is captured, oppressed and made impossible by the formal-bureaucratic education of the educational system that "promotes pedagogical practices that reproduce information, without giving opportunity to research, to create... And without perceiving and analysing reality, ignorant to transform it". Fe y Alegría Argentina also raises the same concern with the following questions: "How to make compatible the formal education demands of the educational system with what popular education requires? How to make it a reality in the center, when we feel that many times the structure of the formal educational system encloses us? How do we walk as a school with the pillars of popular education?"

We are aware of the deep reason for this difficulty; because when we want to bring to life the principles of Popular Education, different intentions come into conflict in our educational work. On the one hand, Fe y Alegría Italia tells us that we need to achieve





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"the insertion of the student in society in a positive and productive way and then, as a citizen, participate in proposals and tasks that have a positive impact on their environment." In turn, Fe y Alegría Nicaragua warns us about a risk: "turning education into a means to insert ourselves in the current globalised world ... implies accepting the terrible inequalities and inhumanity in which we live", therefore, we must always continue insisting in which "Popular Education is committed to recovering and promoting the transformative potential of each person as a subject of their own history and history."

And in this coming and going between what they demand from us from outside and from within our current borders, nationals Fe y Alegría are aware of "we need to be attentive to the changes in scenarios caused by social, cultural and economic transformations", as Fe y Alegría Brasil sums it up in Portuguese. For this reason, according to Fe y Alegría Nicaragua, the relationship with the communities acquires a particular meaning because it is the means to "know their potentialities and problems and thus visualise the processes of change and commit together to solve problems to work on".

However, the community's vision has been weakening in our countries. Fe y Alegría Uruguay notices in its country "a weakening of the social fabric" and public policies linked to the territory" which means "educational centres are actors that work by themselves or with few opportunities for articulation." Fe y Alegría Brasil also recognises that "over the last decade, we have perceived a generalised phenomenon of weakening of local community networks as well as increasingly fragile spaces of social control".

Fe y Alegría Venezuela coincides with Uruguay and Brazil and even investigates the reasons more deeply: "Each of these spaces (community environment, civil society and the state) tends to convert; without being it, in private, bias spaces, without a synergy that generates a superior effect of true cooperation "





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This contemporary socio-political phenomenon leads us to respond in a very diverse way to the question posed by Fe y Alegría Venezuela: "Did we stop dreaming about the communities or did they stop dreaming about us?" Certainly, some Fe y Alegría complain, as is the case of Fe y Alegría Guatemala, about "although the context of the educational community is known, little is planned based on it. The curriculum is addressed more than the needs and interests of the students". Along the same lines, Fe y Alegría Colombia recognises that "it is proposed as a model of solidarity and community work, but little is reflected or replicated in it." In turn, Fe y Alegría Peru states: "The relationship of the Fe y Alegría schools with the communities has weakened over time, affected by both external and internal factors."

However, the community dimension continues to be a permanent commitment, as Fe y Alegría Uruguay expresses it: "The center as a place of reference in the community, which generates an open relationship with the families". Fe y Alegría Brasil adds a political objective: "They must also strengthen their representation in public spaces in order to participate in collective decision-making bodies that impact the public served."

It is not only in the community but also in "the institution where solidarity and community work should be lived," adds Fe y Alegría Colombia: "We must allow the school to become more and more community, giving the possibility of training to everyone and all the inhabitants of the town where they provide their services; from a clear political intention, taking into account historical memory, popular culture, in a flow of exchange where the school has an impact on the community and is influenced by its own popular knowledge".





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And with these words educators from Fe y Alegría Colombia tried, in their reflections, to answer the questions that they asked themselves: “In what way should popular education influence the communities politically? and What is the political commitment of the popular educators? ” Also in Fe y Alegría Argentina they emphasise the concern “to articulate education with the political project of a collective subject, which has different backgrounds and experiences.”

And from Fe y Alegría Paraguay they remind us about the role that educational radio plays in the deployment of this political intention, because “it allows to generate critical awareness in listeners. In a special way in this pandemic it has been possible to expand its field of socio-cultural action, based on the debates”

As we broaden our gaze beyond our current borders, we are discovering new borders of exclusion in which we will have to travel in the future, in which Fe y Alegría Ecuador still recognises “a weak presence such as rural and intercultural education, migration, violence , citizenship, gender, xenophobia, connectivity gaps and lack of technological tools... ”And there, already looking at what is beyond our current borders, to better understand what is happening at the local and territorial level, the proposal made by Fe y Alegría Spain (Entreculturas) acquires all its meaning “include Global Citizenship (as a “sister ”pedagogy of Popular Education) in the curriculum and study plans... as an integral part of a transformative proposal”.

Nonetheless, political intentionality is always followed by an ethical option, which is why Fe y Alegría Venezuela strongly points it out; It is also about “Deepening the ethical and moral values so that they have a positive impact on the members of the community; in the knowledge and strengthening of the culture and regional, national and local identity, to awaken a sense of protection and preservation of biodiversity as a mechanism for survival and continuity of life on the planet ”.





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This project is credible because it is based on a conception of education based on the person transformation; as Fe y Alegría Peru mentioned: "The education we promote is what makes us grow as people, we need schools that are experts in humanity, our classrooms will be different not because they have more means and technological resources but because they are more humane." While for Fe y Alegría Colombia it would be about building "the school of possibilities or possible futures" that will only be achieved if the political commitment is taken seriously. This represents a great challenge for popular educators: "to train for the exercise of politics as a search for the common good, which requires a great vocation of service."

## II. - What the syndemic leaves us <sup>2</sup>

In our times, the only sure thing is the change which originates a series of social transformations that should be reflected in depth; only in this way, we can prevent the transformations from being imposed by certain power groups, and rather allow us to take advantage of the movement to start generating transformations that have been pointed out in the educational field for long time.

The existence of educational problems is not a new issue; since the last century, various authors and pedagogical currents (Freire, Illich, Giroux, McLaren, Freinet, among others) pointed out the dominance of a transmissive education, based on inflexible curriculums, behaviourist, which privilege decontextualised knowledge, the dynamics of control and reproductive role of dominant structures. The school needs, perhaps today more than ever, a reflection that promotes comprehensive knowledge, and overcomes that stagnant teaching in subjects and areas of leisure, sports, concepts, practice ... that may

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<sup>2</sup> Most of the researchers of the Covid 19 consequences maintain that dealing with the virus will make it possible to focus not only on the infectious disease but also on the social context of the people it generates, which is why it is more appropriate to refer to a syndemic (sum of 2 or more epidemics experienced at the same time) than to a pandemic (Tiff-Annie Kenny, 2020).





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be hitting rock bottom. In this sense, we could point out some contributions that the pandemic has made emerge and which we should maintain and deepen.

- The importance of flexibility: We visualise the importance of approaching our students in a friendly way, detecting their needs and rhythms, and for this we have to learn, now more than ever, to be flexible in the demands. Flexibility in education is a paradigm that is related to proximity and inclusion, and can also promote greater horizontality (dialogue of knowledge) between teachers and students.

The emphasis cannot be centred on the accumulation of contents, but on ensuring the permanence of the students in the system; in guaranteeing the right to education, in placing the person at the center of the educational process, instead of the curriculum. In order to do this, we need to underline or prioritise what is important, what is really needed for life and to coexist harmoniously in the context that we are living.

Flexibility can translate into content adaptation, but also in new ways of understanding the teaching-learning relationship, where semi-face-to-face classes (through the internet and radio) starts to acquire a new meaning, which must go beyond the pandemic. This is the case of the Fe y Alegría Paraguay proposal that seeks to monitor students in peripheral territories, or even with people deprived of liberty, as is the case of Fe y Alegría Argentina, or the “educative” proposal of Fe y Alegría Venezuela where radio, web and social networks are combined.

The recovery of non-formal education as a source of inspiration for formal school: For a long time various currents of thought have been warning us of the importance of developing a comprehensive curriculum which groups and coordinates extracurricular spaces in the classroom. In our days, the school should look to non-formal environments to base a self-criticism that allows it to







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adapt to the needs of the students. In the pandemic, it has been shown that non-formal education has managed to adjust to diversity and configure itself as a very wide range of possibilities; they have been able to negotiate times and spaces, they have coordinated with other actors, something that formal schools do not usually do. We could even affirm that the formal school that has been able to respond to the new realities has been the one that has been transformed into a non-formal school, and from there, it has been able to give answers in context. Furthermore, formal education is being overtaken by more visual forms of communication, with more penetration (videos, podcasts, networks ...). Finally, we can see that formal education breaks the curriculum into disciplines, considers the content examination as an unquestionable hegemonic bulwark, and does not usually take into account transversal values, just the opposite of non-formal education, which better handles educational processes and evaluative and interrelate the learning.

On the other hand, it would be much more significant to be able to work sharing some spaces, which means, we could merge playful aspects of non-formal education with the (hard) academic aspects of formal ones. In this way, perhaps we could have a new generation of more significant learning and seek interactions with real life situations where the emotional, affective, attitudinal, cognitive and procedural are connected. In this sense, we must privilege activities which motivate and help students to get out of the hopelessness caused by the pandemic; activities which overcome reluctance and depression and promote an interdisciplinary vision and generate meaningful learning. For this, project work methodologies, multiple intelligences palettes, the use of thought routines, collaborative learning, privileging art, pleasant reading and writing can be very useful, as highlighted in the proposal of Fe y Alegría Uruguay of artistic training as transversal learning for the development of knowledge. It is also important to approach research, to visualise the contribution of each





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science which helps to understand what we live, physical activity, various therapies related to music, laughter, smells, dance, relaxation and meditation ..., activities that can be adapted to popular education methodologies or critical pedagogies whose emphasis is on dialogue and revaluation of knowledge and experiences, and the processes of contextualisation, problematisation and transformation. These new proposals are present in Service Learning or in undertakings with the students and families of Fe y Alegría Guatemala and Venezuela, or in the local development and community empowerment initiatives of Fe y Alegría Colombia.

- Emotional closeness as a fundamental element for communication. It is necessary to underline, especially in those times of pandemic, the need for training support to strengthen better environments for coexistence between the various members of the family, who share the same place. It is urgent and necessary to attend to the emotional, affective, and mental state of families, to work to improve relationships between adults and minors, between couples, with the elderly, where issues such as fraternal and peaceful coexistence are discussed; because reality asks us to develop aptitudes to live in proximity. The contributions of the countries highlight experiences where spaces, times and activities have been built for the emotional strengthening of families, students and teachers, through the formation of educators work teams and managers who dedicate time for close dialogue that allows sharing moods, spiritual and emotional growth, motivation and emotional ties; we have also seen how educators realise the approach to families, a situation that, even though was worrying before, the pandemic has allowed them to experiment with different alternatives to achieve this proximity.

We need to establish new, more horizontal, assertive, listening modes of communication about the situations students and families are facing. At this point, it is not only about generating mechanisms to reach all people, but about





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enhancing in educators the attitude of closeness, care, wanting and needing to know how they are, how they feel, and what students and their families need. It is the love demonstration that can be the guiding thread of the communication that we establish with them, in particular during moments of crisis, from the conviction that it is possible to change the control, the demand and compliance for a human relationship, of care in relaxed environments that help us grow. From our experience as a movement, in this sense, we would have to study the training proposals in Spiritual Intelligence that come to us from Fe y Alegría Uruguay or the program "With God on the Road" of Fe y Alegría Venezuela for the work of interiority and personal spirituality.

- Solidarity networks: It has been important in these times, and still it is, to promote various aids and supports, since the needs are enormous, and it seems there will be more economic, affective, and gender-based violence prevention needs, among other topics. Therefore, emotional support and establishing self-help communities provide that essential support. Solidarity networks, for example, in the face of the problem of food and medicine shortages, difficulties in carrying out school tasks, and getting school supplies... will be increasingly a priority. For this, we need to generate these alliances, those spontaneous and organised networks that allow us to get ahead, promote mutual aid groups in the school and community; it is an essential task that requires us to educate to make it possible. In this regard, we have seen the creation of interesting alliances of support, how groups of families help each other or come together to help other people who have lost their work and have no food, and other experiences that indicate that solidarity is possible. and it becomes real from personal and community commitment that, perhaps, grows from silence and from within. We have a demand which goes beyond the pandemic or the social moment that is generating us (syndemic), to rethink not only for this critical moment; a radical change we are asked to build now. We cannot do the same thing again. Even if we





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are introducing innovative and transformative practices, we must think about what is questioning or reaffirming this crisis that we are experiencing and where we must continue to address efforts. Although none of this is new in education, as it has been looming since the beginning of the last century, the pandemic has revealed the educational emergency and with it the need to remove the bandages that have not let us SEE the non-existence of change, but also it has shown us its possibilities from lived hopes that can become culture.

During this time, we have also keep in touch with distant people and that has also allowed us to create networks with culturally diverse people and from unfamiliar environments, networks which come from transnational processes before the problem of people in states of vulnerability. The challenge is to ensure that these contacts exude proximity and complicity; For this, we will have to improve intercultural competences for a closer “global village” due to the relationships that we are forging.

Examples of this work can be found in the Entreculturas proposal (Fe y Alegría Spain) with the inclusion of content and competencies in Global Citizenship in the curriculum of all stages and in the organisation chart of educational centres. Also in all the proposals for the inclusion of vulnerable sectors that are being developed from different countries: Fe y Alegría Argentina (trans people), Fe y Alegría Venezuela (special education), Fe y Alegría Ecuador (functional diversity), etc.

- ICTs as a conscious search for participatory and humanising resources: The use of digital resources in this pandemic has been exponential compared to any previous moment, which has generated new dynamics that, although they are not totally unknown, they do lead us to reflect on new guidelines and behaviours: (1) in recent years we have been witnessing an unbridled market for audiovisual alternatives without stopping for a moment to reflect in order to know what we need in teaching, changing platforms or apps at an unbridled pace of the





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technological market, printing a consumption that has hardly responded to the learning needs, rather oriented towards the generation of planned obsolescence to have to change equipment for reasons of stock of the large super producers of digital resources. It is necessary to incorporate guidelines for reflection which help technological changes to mature, and perhaps and parallel to this process, the development of a public agency for the rationalisation of the production of digital resources, as already exists in other disciplines in many countries, (such as national drug agencies) where guidelines for use are established and that allow access to the population, in addition to avoiding large technological garbage dumps. The consumption of digital products has been synonymous with innovation, but this pandemic is serving to sift through and think about how the computing resource can be meaningful for participation and learning. (2) On the other hand, we have painfully perceived the digital divide that manifests itself in many families and contexts that was previously more camouflaged and now has shown us that only a part of the population has fluid connectivity. The possibilities of internet connection in the world only belong to half of the population since in many countries access requires a certain economic level, therefore, it is necessary to open a reflection on the accessibility of resources and the means necessary to guarantee it can reach the citizens. Here we also find the good news and examples of life that are being given by popular educators committed to their communities, in rural sectors and indigenous communities, as Fe y Alegría Ecuador and Fe y Alegría Venezuela have done; they have visited home by home to bring materials and work guides to their students, or they have located all their students to establish a connection with each one despite the difficulties, examples that are part of those actions that generate hope for change in the face of these inequalities. (3) Finally, it is necessary to take into account the control that all states are exercising on the population through digital devices due to the circumstances of the pandemic; for the first time it is





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not being hidden and even the population is asking for reflection on it. This reflection is especially pertinent in the educational field since, unfortunately, it is not the first time that there has been "purification" in the educational fields, even more if it is critical pedagogy or popular education, for which a developed protection is required by a judiciary that guarantees freedom processes of thought and personal privacy.

The technological development of recent times is allowing us to approach peripheral territories, and this gives us insight into how we can serve rural populations, sometimes with access difficulties, also educational, but we will have to rethink how we approach so we do not lose close attention. Face to face classes has been revealed as essential for many educational processes, perhaps the mixed models (hybrid) will let grow new educational attention models.

- The environment as a perception of a unique world: The interconnection during this time has also made us realise our environmental dependence: we are very close and any change in the ecosystem has consequences; We have seen it in this pandemic and that is why perhaps it is time to begin to assess our relationship with the environment, including the animals we use in our diet, and how they live before they enter the human food chain. It should also be remembered that many of the animals have ingested large amounts of antivirals, antibiotics and even pesticides, and that many of them have suffered displacement due to climate change or deforestation, which has generated imbalances in ecosystems, without the possibility of gradual adjustment. Consequently, it is necessary to pay attention to some proposals, such as the one Fe y Alegría Argentina has for training in comprehensive proposals in a "circular" key.





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### III.- Place the person at the center and work for a new citizenship

#### Raise autonomous people

In order to be consistent with our decision to join the Global Educational Pact proposed by Pope Francis, and in coherence with what most of the contributions received have stated, the essential objective of all Fe y Alegría educational programs must be the training of Autonomous people, capable of taking responsibility for themselves, of living in solidarity with others and committing themselves to building a just and supportive society. This means working for an education that provides a compass to guide us in this liquid, unjust and turbulent world we live in, and lead us to fairer and more humane paths. An education that, as it was proposed years ago, by Mounier and Freire, among others; whose centenary we are celebrating these days, awakens the human being that we all carry inside, helps us to build personality and channel our vocation as builders of a new society and transformers of this unjust and inhuman world. It is about cultivating all the potentialities of the person and promoting no longer conformity and obedience, but freedom of thought and expression, and sincere, constructive and honest criticism.

Hence the importance about continuing developing a liberating popular education aimed at breaking the "culture of poverty" as a generator of the poor. It is about promoting in the students their self-esteem, the capacity for self-management, the understanding of the modern world in which their poverty is inserted, the criticality of their reality. Education aimed at changing lives, building subjects, people capable of standing up, organising themselves and walking through life with a collective project that gives them meaning. In this way, the immediacy and insecurity, the magical horizon of its history and the shameful nature of its identity are broken. For this, we must insist that educating is helping each person to know, understand, accept and love themselves in order to fully develop all talents and carry out their mission in life with others and for others, not against others.





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It is not enough to teach how to know and love oneself. The challenge of education is to teach how to be the owner and lord of one's life. Human beings are the only ones who can shape our future, who can invent ourselves, and who can invent the world. As Freire<sup>3</sup> stated so insistently, “education makes sense because human beings are projects and we can have projects for the world. The future is not only the future, it is also and above all, to be done”. Unfortunately, in general, education does not teach how to live or coexist, to seriously commit to building ourselves and the world, it does not help us to reflect and ask ourselves about the meaning of life, nor does it enlighten us on what is truly important. It does not teach you to create your own life. The trite and often repeated expression of "education for life" usually means a useful education that enables work, but not an education that teaches how to live authentically, with meaning, with a project, with passion.

Teaching to live fully is, ultimately, promoting freedom. In a world that increasingly fills us with chains, that decides for us what we can and should do, that despises objectivity and truth, that mythologizes empty characters; genuine freedom must be translated into liberation, into a tenacious struggle against all forms of domination, oppression and repression. As Paulo Freire affirmed, the dream of humanisation whose realisation is always process, always becoming, passes through the breaking of real, concrete, economic, political, social, ideological ties ... that are condemning us to dehumanisation. Only where there is freedom there is availability for service, which helps others to break their own bonds. To be free is, in short, to live for others, total availability, service to each person so that he can develop his potential and reach fullness.

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<sup>3</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogía de la Indignación*, Morata, Madrid, 2001, pág. 50 y 132.







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## Teaching how to live together

Now, human fulfilment is only possible in the encounter. One is constituted in person as a being of relationships. All authentic human life is life with others, it is coexistence. The human person is impossible and unthinkable without the other. The characteristic of the human being, what defines us as people is the ability to love, that is, to relate to others seeking their good, their happiness. Hence the need to educate in love and for love, in responsibility and respect, in caring, in learning to become responsible people and honest and supportive citizens.

The growing and unstoppable phenomenon of migration requires us to work for a true interculturality that implies a positive assessment of diversity. In our societies, differences tend to turn into confrontations due to insecurity and fears generated by any form of diversity. However, the well understood difference is a value that enriches us. The inability to deal with diversity ends up generating isolation, confrontation and abysses. This happens in countries, in communities and in organisations. Hence the need to build bridges in a world of exclusive polarities, if we want to walk towards reconciled and fraternal societies. To reconcile is not to standardise, homogenise or silence the points of confrontation, but to help the difference to become value and not an abyss. Or help us, when chasms have been created, to find the way to reestablish the bridges.

Assuming diversity as wealth means accepting different cultures and proposing a genuine interculturality. Culture is not accidental. With it and through it we shape our horizon of meaning, the way of understanding ourselves and others; social customs and habits, ideas, beliefs, values and hopes

In our global world, and in our increasingly mobile society, where around 200 million people migrate and move from one place to another looking for a dignified living





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conditions, people are starting to talk about not only having to respect their rights as persons, but also their cultural rights. Consequently, it is recognised that we live in a multicultural world, where cultures coexist and are juxtaposed without having a true interaction between different groups. The challenge is to move from multiculturalism that affirms the different cultures, which can coexist together without being questioned or influenced by the other, where the dominated in order to survive, must adjust to the norms and principles of the dominant culture, to the interculturality that is always a bidirectional process that can never be unilateral since it is based on meeting, communication and exchange. Consequently, interculturality is not merely a cultural process but is also an ethical and political process that recognises in the exchange a positive and enriching fact. Integrating is equivalent to perfecting each other while maintaining differences, tending towards a whole that is supported by processes of acculturation, accommodation, influence and interaction ... capable of affirming that the other customs, the other faiths, the other stories, the other dreams are also mine. We carry all the bloods, all the colours, all the differences coexist because the entire story is substantiated in each human being. In short, interculturality means affirming that the others, no matter how different they are, exist also within me.

## Coexistence and democracy

Teaching to live together means working to establish genuine democracies aimed at promoting and enabling the experience of human rights for all. The so-called purely electoral democracies, based on the exclusion of many, on inequality and corruption, are not participatory ways of organising society. However the solution is not the authoritarian and repressive imposition of supposed equality in poverty and impotence. Therefore, we must work for a democracy that includes the participation of all in access to information with full transparency, in access to goods through quality public services and equitable redistribution of goods, in giving weight to weakest voices so they can assert their rights and their contributions. Where no one feels entitled to decide what





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others should think, believe or do. Where no one is excluded from the right to work, owning, organising, expressing themselves, living.

Ultimately, a democracy aimed at guaranteeing the common good, which is its fundamental purpose. Let it end a State as the private business of the ruling party and become the guarantor of well-being for all. A State that does not intend to replace the capacities of society, but to facilitate the participation of all in the construction of good living. A State that, due to transparency and adequate legislation, hinders and punishes corruption; and thanks to the multiple forms of organised participation it prevents the concentration of power; a strong state, but not authoritarian.

Authoritarian regimes provoke submission which ends up frustrating the capacity for initiative and creativity. For this reason, they do not care about a poor education for the poor, or they intend to use it, through ideological processes and in this way keep people submissive and obedient.

## Coexistence and spirituality

Educating autonomous subjects; honest and supportive citizens, committed to the common good, also means educating for the deep experience of an incarnated and committed spirituality, like communion with God, with people and with nature.

Spirituality is centred on God's Kingdom, it feeds on a God who only seeks and wants a more just and happier humanity, has as its center and decisive task building a more human life, and invites us to combat everything that threatens it. . It is a spirituality with deep and contemplative eyes, capable of seeing with mercy the suffering faces of the brothers; of midwives hands of life, always extended to the needy; with supportive feet, capable of approaching the beaten and wounded; with open ears, attentive to the cries of pain and the voices and songs of those who celebrate the defence of life; from a prophetic mouth that denounces injustice and announces that the Kingdom is already among us, although not in its fullness, and allows us to feel and taste the taste of God's presence in our midst; of bowels of mercy pregnant with life; with a passionate and





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courageous heart, beating in every breath of life, where all those in need can find shelter and love.

The necessary articulation between spirituality and politics requires us to understand spirituality as the political path of tenderness, capable of considering the diversity of cultures and faces as wealth, capable of including the faces of nature, animals, plants, rivers, trees and mountains; in short, the face of life itself. Spirituality as wisdom of the heart that prompts us to love others and to commit ourselves to the defence of their dignity and their inalienable right to a dignified life. We need to recover the wisdom of the Iroquois nations who considered "spirituality as the highest form of political consciousness."

IV.- Towards the creation of popular educational centres as places of welcome, inclusion and community life, microcosms of the new society and seeds of the Kingdom.

The responses from some countries emphasise the need for Fe y Alegría to commit itself more decisively to creating its own original popular school that responds to our postulates and to the contexts, so that it already becomes a kind of microcosm of society we pretend. We have the danger that our schools continue to resemble others or that their prestige does not come from the criteria of liberating popular education which we have been proclaiming. Taking on this challenge will require us, among other things, to re-read our ways of proceeding and the curricula so that they respond to our intentions and to the demands of the diversity of the different groups we work with. And it will mean restructuring and reorganising our centres, which requires us to go far beyond the makeup changes and the innovations that are in fashion, to see if they are truly shelter and inclusion centres.

As a small contribution to this construction we offer you some indicators that can shed light:





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+ The center has a clear educational-pastoral-community project, which integrates and articulates all programs, activities and equipment, built with the participation of all members of the educational community, which responds to the reality of the environment and the students read from the mission and evangelical values, with concrete objectives and goals, in permanent review, evaluation and reconstruction. Parents, students and teachers participate in the planning, execution and evaluation of the educational-pastoral-community project. The educational project starts from an objective diagnosis of the context we live in, what we are and what we do, a diagnosis of our strengths and weaknesses, of the threats and opportunities, and tries to confront it with the dream of the school we want.

+ Management team that is responsible for the progress of the project, for the quality of relationships and learning, with a pedagogical vocation and true leadership (with authority and not only power), genuine leadership, in the Ignatian style, is a leadership of service, inspires confidence, believes in people, promotes creativity and autonomy. True leaders are bold, unhappy, defy the established order and try to transform it. They make sure people feel good, identify, commit and grow. Servant leaders give their followers a cause to live for and strive for; they overcome authoritarianism and paternalism; they do not generate dependency but stimulate creativity and proposal; they delegate, grant responsibilities, demand, confront. They believe everyone has values to contribute and they help them to develop them. Empathic, they have the ability to put themselves in the position of others to understand before judging; for this reason, they strive so that people feel taken into account, valued and recognised. They seek to bring out the best of each person and make extraordinary people out of ordinary people.

+ Educators teams which conceive education as an ethical project, trained and committed to the humanisation of our society, which strive every day to be better and do their job better to be able to set an example with their word and with their life of





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values guided to sow and reap in their students. Educators who value their profession and are proud of it, with positive expectations for each and every one of their students. Educators, who organise themselves in networks, experts in collaboration, who think, reflect and plan together, help each other, exchange proposals, researches, evaluations and concerns; they understand quality is a personal and collective demand.

Educators who constantly reflect on their practices to learn from them, who train for action, that is, they not only help build knowledge, but also build habits, attitudes, values, affective styles. Educators in permanent training, not so much to increase the curriculum and feel superior, but to serve students in a better way, who for this reason conceive the new diplomas and degrees not as steps that raise them up and away from others, but as stepping stones that enable them descend to the level of the most needy and needy students, to help them emerge and fulfil themselves.

Educators who fulfil their duties and actively defend their rights and demand adequate remuneration and good treatment, which allows them to live with dignity, exercise their profession with joy and continue training.

+ All kind of student teams: sports, cultural, scientific, journalistic, prayer, music, theatre, learning, research, social service ..., with styles and ways of proceeding consistent with the mission of the educational center, well articulated to the pedagogical project -community-pastoral center, in constant review and evaluation in order to improve. In the educational center or program, everyone learns and learns from everyone. Respect, valuing diversity, fraternity, solidarity, more than speeches or theoretical statements, are permanent experiences. In this way, learners learn to compete with themselves in order to share in a better way, so that more than competitive, everyone becomes more and more competent, more aware, more careful, more compassionate and more committed. Learners capable of accepting and critically using new technologies, well aware of their formative and communicative potentialities, but also of some possible dangers like the fact that the person is lost in the anonymity of the networks and their condition as subject of rights and duties is diluted. The excess of information can also lead to the





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realm of superficiality and even addiction to endless information, in which hoaxes, lies, manipulations abound and anything goes equally. On the other hand, in these times of liquid modernity and post-truth, in which everything is uncertain, relative, inconsistent, we can lose fundamental principles and values and run out of roots where we can consolidate and sustain our projects and our lives.

+ Socio-critical pedagogy that guarantees coherence with the postulates and intentions. We often proclaim very worthy ends, but what we do denies or makes impossible what we intend. Hence, pedagogy requires permanent reflection of the practice (what we do) to adapt it to the intentions (what we want) and the contexts (the reality of the students, the center, the community, the country, the world) .

Critical pedagogy needs educators who stimulate the question, the critical reflection on the questions, to overcome the nonsense of an education that demands answers to questions that do not interest. Educators who promote the critical analysis of discourses, norms, proposals and facts; authoritarian and dogmatic attitudes, both of the school reality and of the national and world problems, which enable us to rebuild and reinvent the world. Critical analysis that does not accept the "normality" of an inhuman world and makes a courageous denunciation of everything that threatens life, of all injustices, falsehoods, manipulations, lies.

Pedagogy which analyses critically the use of power. If we truly seek, through education, to empower or strengthen social subjects so that they are capable of promoting truly democratic relationships in all personal, family and social spheres, there is no doubt about the importance of analysing critically the exercise of power. In organisational structures and educational relationships, we are clear today that the use we make of power turns it into domination or a force that builds the new, but we have also learned that oppressive power is not revealed, nor does the empowerment of groups relegated and excluded is constructed from discourses of participation and democracy. This can only be a learning in the concrete of our social relationships.





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This will require an unprejudiced analysis of our structures and organisation charts, and of the way or style of proceeding and relating to each other on a daily basis, having as a reference to Jesus, who never used power for his own benefit, but opted for power as service, power to make people grow, to free them from ties and limitations. This type of power, although we proclaim it, is very difficult because power (and everything associated with it: privileges, fame, benefits, servility of subjects, conception of superiority ...), seduces and traps us.

For this reason, the way of proceeding in our work centres (offices, stations, schools, institutes, training centres ...) must express the values that we preach (simplicity, austerity, friendship, solidarity, responsible work, service, faith, joy, optimism, hope, ...). Unfortunately, patriarchal, authoritarian, discriminatory structures are still entrenched among us and instead of empowering, oppress, segregate and exclude.

+ Physical aspect shows care, cleanliness, affection, creativity, respect and concern of the group. The centres are simple but beautiful, places of welcome and inclusion, where you really live and therefore you learn to live, to coexist, to live for others. Places where you cultivate love to nature, ecological awareness, cosmic brotherhood, austerity and sharing.

+ There is an atmosphere of motivation, understanding, welcome, respect, coexistence, in which differences of gender, race, social, cultural, and modes of learning are respected, and diversity is assumed as wealth. Valuing the different and the different also implies treating with courtesy, working together, respecting, caring for the weakest.

+ The rights of all are defended, especially the weakest and neediest and positive discrimination is practiced, that is, students with the greatest problems, deficiencies and difficulties are attended with special care and dedication. It is urgent that we ask ourselves and objectively analyse whether we are really serving the most needy and excluded, those that the pandemic has thrown out of the system, those who, due to their situation and precariousness, do not even consider the possibility of studying in a center of Fe y Alegría. Therefore, it is not enough to wait for them to come, we have to go







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looking for them. This will require that we analyse our discourse of going to the new frontiers to detect new forms of exclusion beyond economic reasons, such as racial, gender, religious, lagging, or disability reasons.

Hence the need to analyse and review the requirements and demands that we place to enter or remain in our educational programs, so that we really prioritise those who are being excluded and combat the exclusion mechanisms, since it is not enough that we admit students segregated by some type of discrimination, but we must work so that they remain in educational programs as long as possible so that we guarantee their success and avoid their failure. This will mean guaranteeing everyone the necessary conditions (in food, health, resources, tools ...) to guarantee their permanence and learning.

The center is linked and "entangled" with nearby schools, with educational, social and community organisations which seek similar objectives and is linked to the problems of the environment, the country and the world. It cares about the quality education of all children, youth and adults in the community, the country and the world. For this reason, it defends and promotes education as a public good, which implies quality education for all and, consequently, defence of public education, which is not just the government one, but the one of the society, of the whole of society.

In short, the center becomes a place of welcome and care, of inclusion of the excluded, in which the critical understanding of democracy lived in daily life and in society is fostered, but from an ethical conscience that makes the individual subject of change and protagonist in the construction of genuine democratic communities. For this reason, it is educated for true political participation and for the full exercise of citizenship. It is about people managing to understand and experience in a practical way that it is possible to advance in making real the human and Christian values that sustain true coexistence, peace and justice, and that it is worth working tirelessly to build them and defend them.





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## In conclusion

We are very aware of our realities do not always respond to our desires, and of the transformation of our schools into true centres of reception and inclusion, so that they become a microcosm of the new society, or in evangelical terms of the Kingdom; it will require a lot of effort, researching, learning and exchanges. But we remain committed to it to be faithful to our identity as a Popular Education Movement. For this reason, problems and difficulties instead of daunting us, reinforce our resilience, our effort, our creativity, and the decision to continue increasingly articulated and "entangled", to be more consistent with our proclamations and dreams.

