Reflection for Director’s Day, 2009
Schools of the Sacred Heart, Atherton
August 27, 2009

For the purposes of full disclosure, I want to reveal at the outset that the following reflections on the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart Education have been stolen – shamelessly – from Brian Bell and Julia Child.

We’ve had a tradition here at the Schools of the Sacred Heart, Atherton, just as many of our sister schools in the Network, of choosing one of the five goals annually for special attention – for study, reflection and committed action throughout the year. Normally there is a presentation on that goal on Director’s Day which sets the tone for the year.

This year we depart from that tradition.

This is the year when we begin the Sacred Heart Commission on Goals self-study process, so the school has chosen all of the goals for our special attention. Every so often, for every school, choosing all the goals is a really good idea because the Goals and Criteria are not five discrete statements about the mission of Sacred Heart education. They can’t be seen nor can they be lived in isolation, one from another, for they are part of a coherent vision of the education of the whole child, a vision Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat bequeathed to her followers, a vision not absorbed on two or three readings but only after thinking about them and talking about them and trying to live them day after day.

…that’s one of the things that Brian Bell taught me when he used a brilliant simile last year. I had spent a day in October with new faculty and staff. In the course of the day we had a panel of five faculty members, each one offering a reflection on the wisdom and the challenges of a particular goal. Brian was last. He prefaced his remarks with his recent experience of taking up cooking with his wife. Together they were learning the fine art of preparing a meal, and among their discoveries was “the marinade.” Brian suggested that the Goals and Criteria of Sacred Heart Education are a lot like a rich marinade. You have to immerse yourself in them. They don’t get inside you right away. They don’t automatically change the texture of your approach to education nor the taste of the banquet you yourself spread before students. Marinades require just the right amount of seasoning and basting and balance to seep inside and gradually flavor the whole.
A few weeks ago I was mesmerized by the movie *Julie and Julia* so I decided to turn to Julia Child to see what she said about marinades. For Julia, marinating involves turning and basting food in a liquid so that it will gradually absorb the flavor, give off the flavor, and, in the process, become more tender. It takes, she points out, a fair amount of time to become tender.

By a wonderful serendipity it is the word “tenderness,” “tendresse,” that Madeleine Sophie Barat used most often to describe the quality required above all others in a Sacred Heart educator.

It seems to me that a marinade is an inspired way of thinking about the Goals and Criteria. And here’s another implication of the simile… Marinades are made up of a variety of ingredients, a little of this, a pinch of that. It is possible, of course, to experiment with the ingredients, but it can be a disaster to change the balance radically. What if the red wine was never included? What if there was too much cayenne pepper? What if the quality of the olive oil was inferior? The ingredients are, each of them, essential to the whole.

Let me give you one example – borne of the pressures we sometimes feel from parents whose sole preoccupation is academic excellence. We offer here a rigorous college preparatory curriculum; we pride ourselves on our attention to the individual child and on the quality and variety of teaching and learning strategies, on the breadth of a.p. offerings, on the college placements and successes of our graduates. But Schools of the Sacred Heart, Atherton, has other goals which qualify and temper the rigor of our studies. We want our young people to develop hearts of compassion, forgiveness and generosity. We want them to develop a life of faith, a life given for others, a strong character. We want them to know from the inside the injustices of our world and we want them to have the skills of social analysis and advocacy. We want them to become part of a community of learners where each one is valued and each one is respected whatever one’s race, ethnicity, and background. We want them to be hope-filled and balanced, informed and responsible, self-disciplined and leader-ly. We want them, above all, to be convinced that God has given each one of them an amazing array of gifts and a unique mission that only he or she can fulfill – a mission for the transformation of the human community.

All of that is in the marinade. None of it, not one ingredient, is dispensable.

I happen to believe that our vision of education as articulated in the Goals and Criteria for Sacred Heart Schools in the United States is a prophetic vision of
education, but only when it is embodied in each one of us…only when it seeps inside us, and transforms us, and make us tender. The Goals and Criteria is a prophetic statement to the extent that its content is probed and deepened by each of us so that its directions shape not just the students but our own lives and our decision-making. It will be prophetic when boards of trustees add new members, hire a head, shape a budget, determine personnel policies and educational priorities through the lens of this document; when faculty members continually challenge one another to the breadth of vision contained within; when administrators live centered lives and call all their constituencies to the same concern for balance and reflection; when the entire school community relates to one another with respect and uses direct and open communication; when the Provincial Team and the Network Board and the Sacred Heart Commission on Goals use their respective influence to form the adult community in our mission of making known God’s love in this 21st century world – the tap root of the mission we have embraced.

Three specific actions could enable the prophetic to emerge:

first, that we become thoroughly convinced that all five goals are equally important and need always to be carefully calibrated in our decisions and our actions;

second, that we hold ourselves to the behaviors that the Goals and Criteria require, not just the attitudes;

and third, that we concede we are not able to exhaust the content of the Goals and Criteria after one or two readings or a faculty or board retreat. As we said so often in the process of the most recent revision, “values taken for granted or left unarticulated become inoperative.”

Now we begin a new academic year and at the same time we embark on a year of self-study around the living of the Goals and Criteria. Julia Child’s advice to cooks seems perfectly apt for all the adventures this year will hold. I quote from the Fine Art of French Cooking:

- However much you have cooked, always read the recipe first, even if the dish is familiar to you.
- Visualize each step so you will know exactly what techniques, ingredients, time, and equipment are required and you will encounter no surprises.
- Recipe language is always a sort of shorthand in which a lot of information is packed, and you will have to read carefully if you are not to miss small but important points.
• Pay close attention to what you are doing while you work, for precision in small details can make all the difference between passable cooking and fine food.
• A pot-saver is a self-hampering cook, so use all the pans, bowls and equipment you need…
• Clean up after yourself frequently to avoid confusion…
• Train yourself to handle hot foods…
• Keep your knives sharp.
• Above all, have a good time.

Bon appétit!