

# Developing the inner life and changing the world

**THE SPIRITUAL CARE AND GUIDANCE  
AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SERVICE:  
DEFINITION AND ORGANIZATION**

**MINISTERIAL FRAMEWORK**

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION  
SAR-DASSC  
March 13, 2001

32-5405 -A

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Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec  
March 2001

32-5405-A

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## INTRODUCTION

The government guidelines on the place of religion in school, made public by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec<sup>1</sup> in May 2000, stipulated that a spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service for students would be set up in elementary and secondary schools to replace the Catholic pastoral animation and Protestant religious animation services. The guidelines also stated that the service would be defined within “Québec-wide frameworks” and would be funded by the government. This document details various aspects of this service, and thereby constitutes a **ministerial framework** intended to define and organize it.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To prepare this guide, the Ministère sought the **expertise of various people** all of whom have some interest in this service: directors generals of school boards, school principals, teachers, providers of student services, including pastoral and religious animation, parents and students. Specialists in spiritual and community matters also took part in discussion. Those consulted included representatives from elementary and secondary schools, from rural and urban areas, from small and larger schools, and of different spiritual orientations. Moreover, a review of the literature on the two constituent parts of the service, its spiritual and community aspects, had been prepared prior to all consultations.

The Ministère de l'Éducation extends its thanks to all contributors whose comments and work made the publication of this document possible.

## GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

The government guidelines stated that the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service **would be offered to all students**,<sup>2</sup> regardless of their religious affiliations, and would not be affiliated with any particular denomination. It is perceived as a service that takes into account the trends and influences that shape the life of young people, and it will use all the resources that the school and community can offer to promote the human and spiritual growth of students, while respecting their freedom. Under these government guidelines, the activities of the service may be humanitarian, spiritual, interfaith or religious and may focus on:

- young people's search for meaning
- the development of social conscience
- the humanization of the environment
- community involvement
- students' needs with regard to their own religious affiliation

The government guidelines were used as a primary reference in devising this ministerial framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 18 (49-1319-01A).

<sup>2</sup> This and other ideas contained in this paragraph are discussed on pages 14 and 15 of the foregoing document.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

This document is intended for staff working in the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement services in elementary and secondary schools, members of school teams, school board administrators who will play a role in the provision of the service, and parents. It will enable all these people to better understand the government guidelines related to the service and to implement them in their respective settings.

## CONTENT

This ministerial framework consists of three parts. The first part deals with the **definition** of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service. It also explains the relevance of the service and its nature, presents its goal and objectives and details its implementation in the school. The second part deals with the **organization** of the service. It offers various considerations on the pedagogical aspects of the service, describes the type of training and skills required for those involved and presents some preconditions that would guarantee its quality. The third part discusses the meaning attributed to the words “spiritual” and “community involvement.”

The content of this document may be modified to ensure that this service reflects the Ministère’s new policy intentions with regard to student services. If necessary, any expertise developed within the school system during the first year in which this service is offered could be used to improve this ministerial framework.

## PART I: DEFINITION OF THE SERVICE

### RELEVANCE OF THE SERVICE

"It [the school] must also offer students various activities—cultural, sports, science, social, etc.—to round out and enhance their education. These activities should include spiritual support and community involvement."<sup>3</sup> This point of view expressed in the government guidelines on the place of religion in school reflects the general consensus that emerged from the hearings on this issue that were held by the Parliamentary Committee on Education in the autumn of 1999. The importance of such a service was also recognized in the report of the task force on the place of religion in the school, published earlier that same year.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, these have created significant **social expectations**. Why is there such a consensus on the need to set up this service? What, in fact, is expected of it?

Students in elementary and secondary school are not simply students. They are first and foremost **girls and boys in a period of intensive** physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social and psychological **growth**. The dynamism of young people, developed to different degrees depending on their age, manifests itself in a variety of ways, including a sense of wonder and curiosity, openness to the inner life, group spirit, and the desire to assert themselves and go beyond their limits. They consciously or unconsciously use these strengths to gradually construct their personal identities and integrate into society. They strive to get to know themselves and others; their preferences and interests are shaped through multiple activities and commitments; they are concerned about their future and they gradually find their place in life. As they develop their personality, young people want to talk to each other, express themselves, be recognized and be loved. Young people expect us to provide them with enthusiastic guidance while respecting their abilities and their learning pace.

On the other hand, during this growth, young people **have to deal with major difficulties**. Some of these are associated with physical, intellectual, psychological or social problems including, for example, bodily handicaps, learning difficulties or academic failures, the separation of parents, unhappy love affairs and rejection by others. Additional difficulties may stem from the environment in which they live. The latter might include, for example, conflicts related to the coexistence of different cultures, the loss of moral guidelines due to a plurality of value systems, the pain of living (revealed by the high suicide rate), social exclusion and unemployment (often created by economic problems), societal calamities and violence. These realities have an impact on the meaning and value that young people attribute to life; they constitute significant **challenges to their growth**. For the people who deal with them, these realities pose serious **educational challenges** that call for considerable guidance, unconditional acceptance, active listening and constant support.

Parents are cognizant of their children's dynamism and difficulties. They would like the best for their children. They want them to have self-esteem, to have confidence in themselves and in others, to have a taste for life, to carve out a place for themselves in life and to become active players in society. In short, they **want their children to become autonomous and happy men and women**.

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<sup>3</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 14. (49-1319-01A).

<sup>4</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Religion in Secular Schools: A New Perspective for Québec*. Task Force on the Place of Religion in Schools in Québec (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1999), 220. (49-9000A).

On the other hand, society expects all its members to do their best and utmost to further its development. People are called upon to realize their potential, establish harmonious and supportive relationships with one another, and fully and democratically contribute to the evolution of society. In short, society hopes that they will become **effective and involved citizens**.

The aspirations of young people, as well as the expectations of their parents and society, are convergent and complementary. **Effort and perseverance on the part of everyone involved** are needed to meet these aspirations and expectations. Insofar as **the school is concerned with ensuring that students experience genuine and complete success**, it assumes very specific responsibilities and duties in this regard because "education . . . plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and of Québec society as a whole."<sup>5</sup>

Setting up a spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service will become **an ideal way for the school to contribute to young people's overall development**. This service is particularly helpful due to its **integrative approach** because, as it has been said earlier, it is in tune with the students' desire to be successful on both a personal and social level.

This service is designed as **a tool to accompany students** in their search for identity and quest for meaning, in their need for recognition and belonging, in their effort to develop an open attitude toward difference and plurality, and in their desire to find mutual understanding, to play a role in their community and to help others. It provides students with an opportunity to **take steps** along the difficult but necessary path of humanization, with all its ups and downs.

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<sup>5</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Statement in Support of Efforts to Promote Education and Educational Success* (joint commitment by the major partners in education) (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, September 18, 2000).

## THE NATURE OF THE SERVICE

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is a student service that is, in a sense, a laboratory of life that allows students to develop their spiritual life and become involved in society through reflection and practical experience.

### A NON-CONFESSIONAL SCHOOL SERVICE

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is a **school service**, meaning that it is **offered to students and takes account of everything that characterizes the school**, be it the school's mission, its procedures, its strengths and limitations.

The school where this service will be provided is:

- common because it serves all the students in a given area
- inclusive because it welcomes all students regardless of their talents, their limitations, their social, cultural or religious backgrounds, etc.
- democratic because it teaches civic values like respect for rights and freedoms and participation in making decisions affecting society at large
- open because it gives students access to the world of knowledge and a vast culture rooted in the community it serves, with all its social, cultural, religious and other diversities

Like a good number of other services provided in school, the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service deals with issues of concern to family, political, community or religious institutions, **without, however, replacing these institutions**. In fact, this service will complement those institutions by offering students activities that **prepare them for life and help them integrate into society**.

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is **non-confessional**. This means two things:

- 1) It is **not intended to carry out the specific mission of the Churches or religious groups**, or to serve their interests.
- 2) Regardless of their religious beliefs, **those who provide this service will not act on behalf of Churches or religious groups**. They are not entitled to promote either the perspectives or the rituals of any Church or religious group.

### SPIRITUAL LIFE AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In order to better understand the nature of the service, it would be appropriate to define what we mean by spiritual life and community involvement and explain the links between these two concepts.



## ***Spiritual life***

Spiritual life is often associated with such words as inner life, belief, religion, philosophy of life, transcendence, God, etc. It finds expression in quests, doubts and a wide range of attitudes and behaviours that **always relate to the big questions of life**, namely its origin, value, purpose and ultimate outcome. Although spiritual life is understood and experienced differently by different individuals, in different places and in different eras, the various points of view generally converge on the following idea:

Spiritual life is **an individual quest within the context of a community**, one rooted in the fundamental questions of the **meaning of life**, and that tends toward the construction of a **consistent, motivating and continually evolving vision of existence**.

## ***Community involvement***

The widely accepted meaning of community involvement is "improving the world in which we live" or "doing something for others." This is a simple and sound way of seeing community involvement, but is not sufficient to reveal all the aspects of this concept. Upon further reflection, we could define community involvement as follows:

a **contribution of the individual to community life** based on the **recognition of the value and dignity of human beings** and oriented toward the construction of a **more harmonious and supportive society**.

Each component of all the definitions given here will be discussed in Part III of this document, entitled *The Meanings of Words*.

## ***The relationship between spiritual life and community involvement***

Spiritual life and community involvement are **distinct, yet interrelated**, notions. It cannot be otherwise, because human beings are complete individuals.

Early in their spiritual lives, individuals realize that we are all human. Their efforts to understand and live their lives make them realize that they are independent and interdependent at the same time, and that life is often harsh. They **may therefore come to feel responsible, along with other people, for the betterment and the future of other human beings and of society in general**. They may become so concerned about others that engaging in common activities with others and for others becomes a necessity. For many people, spiritual life may lead "to a transcendence of personality" whereby they feel compelled to treat "all . . . beings . . . with same compassion and disinterested goodwill."<sup>6</sup> All major religious and philosophical texts, and modern-day UNESCO, consider the love of others to be a "golden rule": **treat others the way you would like them to treat you**. UNESCO even regards the spiritual choices of individuals as one of the sources of inspiration for global ethics.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Huxley, Aldous, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Triad Grafton, 1985), 68.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity, Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development* (November 1995), 36. (Go to <http://www.unesco.org> and follow the links to this report).

Then again, community involvement may help individuals to develop their self-esteem, a sense of belonging and the conviction that their actions can make a difference. These are important, positive outcomes that, in turn, affect their spiritual life, in as much as it helps **to shape their personal identities and give them a more solid grounding in society and in their lives.** Community involvement, on the other hand, often exposes the individual to a number of human miseries: loneliness, psychological distress, school problems, parental separation, unemployment, destitution, suicide, homelessness, exploitation of peoples, natural and ecological disasters, etc. Contact with these harsh realities of life raises fundamental questions: Why all this? Where will it lead? Is there any better future? Is life worth living? If God exists, what is he doing? Etc. As a result, individuals find themselves in a situation that might cause them to **question their beliefs, their religion or their philosophy.** When this happens, they once again become immersed in their spiritual life.

Individuals develop a vision of existence that explains why and how they have decided to contribute to social life. Conversely, their involvement in society enriches and transforms their spiritual life. As a result, a person's spiritual life and community involvement are symbiotically related.

## A STUDENT SERVICE

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is one of the **student services.** Therefore, in its own way, it works toward the same goal, which is to foster the students' advancement in their various areas of learning. It is both a complement to the instruction they receive and a response to their need for an overall education. It is a **right** to which preschool, elementary- and secondary-level students are **entitled by law.** The school board must ensure that the school offers this service.<sup>8</sup>

Some matters that concern the entire system of student services are not discussed in this document or, when necessary, are dealt with very briefly. To obtain more information on these matters, refer to *the Cadre de référence des services éducatifs complémentaires (the Guide to Student Services).*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Section 6 of the *Education Act* gives students the right to receive spiritual care and guidance and community involvement services; section 226 requires school boards to ensure that the schools under their jurisdiction offer this service.

<sup>9</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires, *Pour vivre, apprendre et réussir à l'école : cadre de référence des services éducatifs complémentaires* (Working title) (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, forthcoming in Spring 2001). [Free translation]

## A LABORATORY FOR LIVING

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service may be compared to a laboratory, a place where something is in preparation, is being developed. Within the school, it is a place devoted to research and experimentation, where **student researchers** can ask each other questions, advance hypotheses and carry out practical experiments on everything concerning the meaning of life and community involvement. For the students, the service is **a place where meaning and a sense of solidarity are developed**. It is a place of **discovery** and creation, where they learn to **express themselves** and **think critically** and where **concrete action is paramount**. It allows students to **interpret** their personal history and to link it to that of the community.

Various members of the school team can contribute to the activities of this laboratory, which are supervised by a **coordinator**. This coordinator, or service animator, plays a threefold role in relation to the students: he or she **provides opportunities** for their active involvement, **helps them stepping back** and **offers them support**. This role, as we will see later, is one of guidance.

In the course of their research and experiments, students talk among themselves and with the animator, sharing their questions, discoveries, achievements and failures, their ways of doing things, of living and of being. The laboratory is therefore a place of **dialogue** between people of various origins and with different points of view. It is a place of **cooperation**, where the students' lives are enriched by the experience of others and where they place their own quest at the service of others. This is especially true, since the students are, in a sense, the object and the subject of the activities conducted in the laboratory.

Research and experimentation yield results, which validate or invalidate the students' intuition and expectations. These results sometimes lead to the unexpected. In fact, the results are never predetermined. They can be satisfactory and encouraging or disappointing and discouraging.

Sometimes, the results can provide students with a better knowledge of themselves and greater self-esteem, a better understanding of the meaning of their life and life in general, and a stronger identity. These results may encourage them to pursue their spiritual quest and to improve their community and society. Such results give students motivation and satisfaction.

The results may also create doubt and uncertainty, lower their self-esteem, weaken their confidence in themselves and others, make it difficult for them to find a meaning to their life and cause them to lose the incentive to honour their commitments. Such results could lead to disappointment and waning motivation. In such a case, the coordinator plays a key role in helping students understand what is happening to them and maintain their enthusiasm to persevere and progress.

Whatever the nature of the results, they must be viewed as a springboard from which students can restart their research and experimentation. As in any laboratory setting, the process is more important than the results. The effectiveness of the students' research and experimentation is primarily measured by their **perseverance and effort** to continue their quest for an autonomous and responsible spiritual life and to remain committed to the development of a more harmonious and supportive society.

As with any analogy, the parallel between this service and a laboratory involves both strengths and limitations. It is up to each coordinator to make appropriate improvements and adjustments.

In any event, one thing is certain: every individual activity taken in isolation does not, in and of itself, constitute a laboratory, but instead represents one step, one aspect. The laboratory for living includes the environment that the animator manages to create or foster, as well as the entire range of collective and individual activities carried out with or for the students. The personal commitment of the students and the animator to the laboratory also determines its essential nature.

## THE GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SERVICE

Although part of the student services programs, the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service has its own specific goal, which is to:

foster the **development of an autonomous and responsible spiritual life** among students and their contribution to the **building of a harmonious and supportive society**.

The objectives of the service will enable the students to:

- reflect and experiment in situations designed to help them progress freely in their spiritual lives
- undertake individual and group projects likely to improve their community and the society around them
- build links between their spiritual life and community involvement, with a view to greater personal unity and social coherence

## A SERVICE ANCHORED IN THE REALITY OF THE SCHOOL

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service will be anchored in the school through many links, which are outlined below.

### THE LINK WITH THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

The school's mission is to provide students with instruction and qualifications and to socialize them with a view to their educational success.

This service can contribute to the first two elements of the school's mission, i.e. instruction and qualifications, but its primary role lies elsewhere. This service focuses more on the **socialization of students** because to socialize is to promote "social cohesion by fostering a feeling of belonging to the community and teaching students how to live together." To socialize is also to "pay attention to how students define the meaning of life on a personal and social level." In addition, to socialize is to "promote the fundamental values of democracy and prepare young people for their role as responsible citizens." Finally, to socialize is to "prevent exclusion."<sup>10</sup> The socialization element of the school's mission is the one that best corresponds to the objectives of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service.

On the other hand, the school's complete mission is carried out within the framework of the *Québec Education Program* through the development of subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies and in connection with various areas of lifelong learning.

Like the other services, the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service, through its various activities, can help the students develop the full range of cross-curricular competencies, but especially those of a personal and social nature, because they "help develop character and identity. They prepare students for life as members of a community in a social environment that is increasingly broad, diversified and complex, and help them come to terms with their sexuality."<sup>11</sup>

The service's contribution to the development of the various subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies **occurs mainly through three areas of lifelong learning: world-view, citizenship and community life, and social relationships**. These areas are the service's **preferred focuses of action**. Students involved in the activities of the service will see that it provides an additional opportunity to integrate and transfer the different things they have learned.

In the *Québec Education Program*, each of these areas of lifelong learning involves an educational aim expressed in terms of behaviours and attitudes that the students are expected to have developed. It may be useful to review the main points in this regard.

**World-View:** "the student gradually constructs a dynamic world-view that gives meaning to his/her life"<sup>12</sup> by developing "the capacity for introspection, or reflection on the facts and events

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<sup>10</sup> The quotations in this paragraph are taken from Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *The Québec Education Program* (13-0003-01A) (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

of daily life."<sup>13</sup> This world view "must also be tested, in order to develop, become more consistent and give meaning to all experience."<sup>14</sup>

**Citizenship and Community Life:** "The student takes part in democratic life by playing an active role in school and society in a spirit of openness to the world and respect for diversity."<sup>15</sup>

**Social Relationships:** "The student participates actively in his/her learnings with other members of his/her community."<sup>16</sup> In the centre of this interaction, "the feeling of mutual acceptance gives them a sense of belonging to the class. This process enables children to consolidate the emotional bases of their active participation in a community of learning. . . . They are . . . proud to contribute their strengths and talents the collective project and they accept all the responsibilities associated with learning various things . . . "<sup>17</sup>

## THE LINK WITH THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

Under the responsibility of the governing board, the educational project consists of objectives and values chosen and promoted in the school by everyone involved. The service animator must **work together with the other members of the school team to develop and implement** the educational project and draw upon the team's resources when **planning** his or her activities.

Moreover, under section 36 of the *Education Act*, "A school shall, in particular, facilitate the spiritual development of students so as to promote self-fulfilment." Service animators, by the very nature of their duties, are required to **work in conjunction with all the school's partners** on this aspect of the school's "mission" and to help fulfil it.

## THE LINK WITH THE STUDENT SERVICES PROGRAMS

According to the *Québec Education Program*, all those involved in the school system must be concerned with the students' academic achievements. It is from this perspective that the student services provided for in the *Basic school regulation*<sup>18</sup> are integrated into different programs so as to foster the cooperation and collaboration of the entire school team. This converging approach also applies to the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service.

The following examples show how this service can centre around four programs that must be developed by the school board:<sup>19</sup>

1) Learning support services designed to provide students with conditions that are conducive to learning

The service animator contributes to the work of the learning support services by sharing **information and expertise** with different members of the school team. More particularly, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Basic School Regulation for Preschool, Elementary and Secondary School Education*, Order in Council 651-2000, *Gazette officielle du Québec*, June 14, 2000, ss. 4 and 5.

<sup>19</sup> By virtue of section 224 of the *Education Act*, school boards are required to develop such programs.

animator makes school team members aware of how the development of spiritual life and community involvement promotes students' learning. In addition, the animator should recognize the experience and knowledge of the school team in this matter. The animator cooperates with other teachers so that the students' subject-specific learning can be enhanced by what they have learned in developing their spiritual and community life. From this perspective, special collaborative relationships can, for example, be established with religion, moral education, history or science teachers.

2) Student life services designed to contribute to the development of students' independence and sense of responsibility, to their spiritual and moral dimension, to their interpersonal and community relationships, and to their feeling of belonging to the school and society

Student life services are the prime focus of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service. The service animator contributes to student life services through cooperation with other school team members by offering students activities that gradually enable them to take control of their personal and social life. Students have to find their own answers to fundamental questions they may have and find solutions to life's difficulties and challenges. In the course of these activities, students develop a concern for the quality of their relationships with others, starting with the people in their school and their family. Through these activities, students learn that humans are interdependent and that by taking action for the benefit of others, they, along with these other people, are helping to improve the well-being of the community and society. This kind of involvement allows students to develop their independence and a sense of responsibility and solidarity, as well as fulfilling relationships.

3) Counselling services designed to help students, throughout their studies, with their academic and career choices and with any difficulties they encounter.

The service animator contributes to counselling services by offering individual and group activities that help students to better understand particular issues they are concerned with or that help them to overcome difficulties they may encounter with regard to spiritual life and community involvement.

4) Promotion and prevention services designed to provide students with an environment conducive to the development of a healthy lifestyle and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

The service animator contributes to promotion and prevention services, in particular by cooperating with other school team members in organizing and conducting joint activities (e.g. a non-violence week, peer mutual assistance, suicide prevention camp) that will help students better understand who they are and what they want to be and by giving them an opportunity to improve their community and society.

## **THE LINK WITH THE SCHOOL TEAM AND ITS PARTNERS**

### ***The School Administration***

The service animator must set up a **close link with the school administration**. This will consist in providing the administration with information and guidance with respect to students' needs in



terms of spiritual life and community involvement. As part of this link, the administration will be asked to give its opinions on various aspects of the service or school life.

### ***Other Staff Members, Partners and Parents***

Spiritual care and guidance and community involvement are rooted in a very specific context, namely the environment where students live their individual and social life. It is essential that the animator works in conjunction **with the main players in the school and community: teachers, non-teaching staff, parents,** and the various **organizations** and **groups** in the area served by the school (social movements, youth centres, CLSCs, community agencies, religious denominations, etc.).

These links form networks for the **exchange of information** and **dialogue**. They allow all the partners to come to know each other, develop confidence and **work together** on projects defined in accordance with common priorities in order to develop in students competencies related to spirituality and community life.

Finally, if students wish to do so, they can use these networks to continue developing their spiritual lives and community involvement.

## PART II: THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SERVICE

### PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### THE ROLE OF THE ANIMATOR

Since the animator of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service must take into account "the trends and influences that mark young people's life,"<sup>20</sup> he/she must be aware of the situation they are facing, i.e. aware of what they are experiencing, of what animates them or of what disturbs them on a personal and social level.

The animator's role is to help students do their best and utmost to make progress with regard to their spiritual life and community involvement. The training and experience that the animator is expected to have in these areas will enable him/her to guide students. Essentially, the animator's role is one of providing **guidance** to students.

This involves:

- **creating conditions and offering activities** conducive to their research and experimentation with spiritual life and community involvement
- having confidence in them, instilling confidence in them and being aware of who they are and what they are experiencing. It also involves paying respectful attention to their questions
- **believing that students are the main agents of their progress in school** and being convinced that they possess within themselves and in their social environment a huge potential for developing an autonomous and responsible life and for building a more harmonious and supportive society
- being aware that the animator him/herself can grow with the work done with young people. It also involves talking to students about one's own worldview and motivations for doing certain things in society. In short, it means agreeing to **travel together** on the road to greater humanity while starting out from different life experiences

#### RESPECT FOR STUDENTS

The one professional attitude that the animator must constantly show is **respect for students**.

This involves:

- using **pedagogy that is adapted** to their stages of development and learning pace
- **taking account of the range of knowledge and experience they already possess** in terms of spiritual life and community involvement, and that comes to them from their families and their cultural environment

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<sup>20</sup> Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 15.

- **recognizing the students' right to freedom of conscience and religion**, while refusing to impose any specific ways of acting, thinking or living on them in terms of spiritual life or community involvement
- **showing consistency** between his or her words and actions.

The animator must avoid placing students in situations where, because of their developmental age, they feel cut off from their family and cultural heritage, i.e. placing them in opposition to the convictions, values and beliefs that they have received at home. One can and must encourage such students to develop an open attitude toward difference, especially with regard to spirituality, but this must be done **carefully and gradually**.

## A PARTICULAR APPROACH

The service has been compared to a laboratory so as to emphasize that the type of learning it offers is **centred on action**. The approach presented here, which conveys this intention and can inspire the animator, consists of three phases: **acting, reviewing** and **renewing**. The respective roles of the animator and students will change with each phase.

### Acting

This phase involves **concretely experiencing different facets** of spiritual life and community involvement by thinking and acting in ways that reflect the realities facing the students and the school.

The animator's role is to create an environment and introduce activities conducive to action. The animator's main concern is to provide students with **opportunities to experience** different things, to stimulate them and to heighten their awareness . He/she makes sure that students are prepared to act, i.e. they fully understand why they are taking action and how they will go about doing so.

When participating in proposed activities, students observe, become aware, explore, discover, take action and experiment. They are in a position to **experiment** various facets of spiritual life and community involvement.

### Reviewing

This phase consists in **stepping back from one's experience** of spiritual life and community involvement.

The animator gives students opportunities to reflect, to ask themselves questions and to call their own thinking into question. His/her main concern is to **help them examine** their reasons for living and being socially involved. The animator gets students to think critically about their own worldview and their motivations for involvement with others and confirms the validity of their actions.

Students take the time to examine and better understand how their spiritual life and community involvement has evolved. They make an effort to analyze what they have done in order to determine the value and consequences of their actions. This is an opportunity for them to make

useful distinctions, to see where they are and to **reconsider** what they are doing or experiencing and what inspires them.

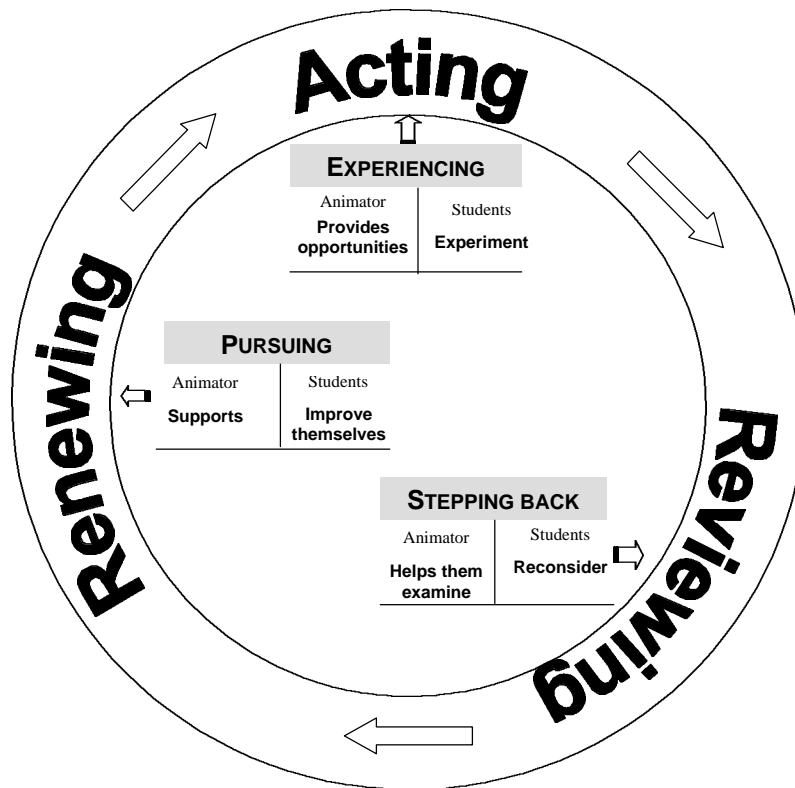
## Renewing

This phase consists in finding new ways of **pursuing research and experimentation** in the area of spiritual life and community involvement.

The animator encourages students to pursue an increasingly autonomous and responsible spiritual life and to get involved in society in a more harmonious and supportive fashion. His/her paramount concern is to **give them support**, help them along in their development and encourage them to continue taking more and more meaningful action.

Students engage in new types of research and experimentation. They strive to **improve themselves**, try to transform and consolidate their worldview and their contribution to society. They embark on a new road, take on new challenges and ask themselves new questions.

The figure below illustrates the three phases described above:



For these activities to be fully educational and beneficial to students, **the three phases must be implemented**. Together these constitute a dynamic process that maximizes students' potential for real progress. However, it is not necessary for each activity to incorporate the three phases. For example, the "reviewing" phase could be introduced, at least in part, during the "acting" phase. Or the "acting" phase could be extended to several activities before the "reviewing" phase is introduced.

## THE TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

As its name indicates, the service offers activities related to "spiritual life" and "community involvement." It is **essential that both types of activities be offered**, since they correspond to the two major components of the students' lives, namely, their personal lives and their life in society.

As stated in the government orientations regarding the place of religion in the school, some religious or interfaith activities may be organized. Thus, the question arises as to the place of religious celebrations. The organization of such activities **must take account of several perspectives**; otherwise the service will run the risk of losing its non-confessional character.

First of all, it is important to understand that the meaning attributed to "spiritual life" in this document is based on the idea that religious celebrations take on **an exceptional character** within the general framework of this service. No activity, including religious celebrations, should be **subsumed within a process whose goal is to develop the students' faith**.

The nature of the service is such that activities must favour **dialogue and ease of understanding among the various religious affiliations**, as opposed to an emphasis on their particularities. Its academic character implies that religious celebrations, like any other activity, must be **provided for when planning the service** and, consequently, must be justified from an **educational perspective**. In the case of unforeseen events (for example, the death of a student), the decision whether to organize this type of activity in the school must be taken in conjunction with the principal.

We should also mention that this type of activity must be organized in a way that shows **respect for all students' freedom of conscience and religion**. In all instances, the animator should, when planning these activities, take account of students' **actual situations** and the **particularities of the school** and, in doing so, demonstrate **good judgement**.

Moreover, Churches or religious groups may make **individual requests** for confessional activities or religious celebrations. These may, for example, involve the use of the premises for worship-related activities outside of school hours, or students' participation in obligatory religious practices. **Such requests do not directly concern the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service**. Accordingly, **they must be dealt with by the school**, and not by the animator of this service. If, however, the animator's opinion might be useful in the decision-making process, the issue must be taken up by the governing board.

### ***Activities Related to Spiritual Life***

These activities are designed to help students develop an **autonomous and responsible spiritual life**.

They enable students to become aware of their inner lives and their spiritual side; to reflect on the meaning and importance of existence; to come to terms with the fundamental questions of life; to discover the meaning of things and give themselves reasons for living; to be open to difference and the diversity of ways of thinking and living; to compare their discoveries with those of others; to look for the fruits of Québec's cultural and religious history; to familiarize themselves with the rites and symbols, religious or otherwise, of their culture; and to define and gradually adopt a coherent and motivating vision of the world.

**Some examples** of activities related to spiritual life are listed below. This list is not exhaustive, and it is up to each animator to expand it in accordance with the concrete situation facing his/her students and school.

- Exercises on self-esteem
- A week devoted to beliefs
- Interiorization using short stories or allegories
- Reflection based on issues related to ethics, science, current affairs, etc.
- Experiments based on the exploration of nature, the arts, rituals and symbols
- A stay in a monastery
- Discussions on beliefs, whether religious or not
- Time devoted to the inner life, or to the celebration of important events in school or social life

### ***Activities Related To Community Involvement***

These activities are designed to encourage students to **contribute to the building of a harmonious and supportive society**.

They enable students to become aware of the importance of devoting oneself to the service of others; to reflect on the meaning and importance of life in society; to develop a sense of belonging in their schools and communities; to learn how to establish harmonious relationships; to appreciate the value of mutual assistance and volunteer work; to develop their social conscience; to recognize the dignity of all people, particularly that of the marginalized; to become involved in individual and group projects that make it possible to improve their communities and society and to assume their roles as citizens.

**Some examples** of activities related to community involvement are listed below. This list is not exhaustive, and it is up to each animator to expand it in accordance with the concrete situation facing his/her students and school.

- Leadership training camps
- Social justice committees, or committees for introducing students to democratic life or responsible citizenship
- Activities designed to promote awareness of international solidarity, basic human rights and the fight against poverty

- Meetings with prisoners, the homeless and the elderly
- Fundraising campaigns
- Aid trips to third world countries
- Teams of peers that work toward suicide prevention, that provide assistance to students with problems and that offer help with homework

### ***The Helping Relationship***

Animators also conduct individual or group guidance activities to help students **gain a deeper understanding of particular issues** they are concerned with or to **help them solve problems** they have encountered in the realm of spiritual life and community involvement.

These activities must fit into the framework of student support services that the school board must develop and can be carried out with the help of the school's internal and external resources. Under certain circumstances necessitating a specialized follow-up, for example, problems that require therapy, students must be referred to one of these resources.

## REQUIRED TRAINING AND QUALITIES

### TRAINING

The training expected of animators is set out in the *Plan de classification du personnel professionnel des commissions scolaires*.<sup>21</sup> This document stipulates that providers of this service must hold an **undergraduate university diploma** that includes courses in each of the following **four areas**: spiritual life, social life, psycho-pedagogy and practice. For those who do not have the required training, the school board may consider equivalent training or relevant experience, in accordance with established practices.

The reader can obtain more information on this subject by consulting the *Plan de classification*.

In addition to the initial training required, animators, like all those with professional responsibilities, must take care to **keep abreast of new work-related knowledge and practices**. Study sessions, university courses, conferences, congresses organized by professional associations, sharing of experiences with colleagues, etc. are ideal opportunities for keeping up-to-date.

### QUALITIES

In addition to adequate training, animators must:

- **be open-minded**, in other words, they must be good listeners, in addition to being adept at discussion, welcoming others and showing respect for them while taking account of their uniqueness and diversity, particularly on the cultural and religious levels
- **have a positive personal view of** spiritual life and community involvement
- **have critical thinking skills**, in other words, an ability to step back from things and to gauge their true value, while showing objectivity and good judgement

The school board should pay special attention to these qualities when hiring animators.

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<sup>21</sup> This document is currently being revised to take account of the new spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service. Details on the four areas that should be incorporated into training can be found in its appendix.



## QUALITY CONDITIONS

### STAFFING

Each school board in concert with each school has the responsibility to determine the number of staff and the amount of time required for its schools to offer quality service. Those that choose to go beyond a certain threshold of feasibility can only sacrifice the quality of service offered to students. A single rule will not necessarily apply to all schools, given their particularities. To determine the number of animators required, each school must **take account of various factors** such as the number of students to be served, the extent of its cultural and religious diversity, the number of schools to be visited and the size of the territory to be covered.

#### ➤ *Particularities of elementary schools*

Two of the abovementioned factors, namely, the number of schools to be visited and the size of the territory to be covered, specifically concern elementary schools. When deciding on the number of staff required to provide the service in its schools, the school board will have to pay particular attention to these factors.

From another perspective, in order to maximize the efficiency of the service during its first few years of operation, the school boards could decide to hire those already in charge of pastoral or religious animation in elementary schools, provided that, during the hiring process, these people show that they match the expected profile.

### SITES AND BUDGETS

In order for animators to effectively meet students' needs, it is essential that the service have **adequate material resources**. Although it is difficult to set a standard that could apply equally to all schools, the latter must ensure that sites are available for individual and group activities, and that a sufficient annual budget is allocated for planned activities.

### PART III: THE MEANINGS OF THE WORDS

The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service will not be well understood unless the words "spiritual" and "community involvement" are clarified.

#### THE WORD "SPIRITUAL"

Etymologically, this word comes from Latin and translates a Greek word that means "breath." It relates to the idea of "wind" or "air." It also means "spirit," "soul" and even "emotions." In any event, regardless of languages and traditions and despite some differences in meaning, this word refers to a reality that transcends human beings, to something immaterial, intangible and unpredictable (like the wind), and without which the universe would be nothing more than lifeless matter. This is a vital force intimately connected with the existence of being, but that is, in a sense, "beyond" itself.

Today, the word "spiritual" still conveys similar ideas like the spirit, the immaterial, the soul (higher principle) or the non-physical universe. Most people acknowledge that they have a "spiritual life," as defined earlier in this document (i.e. **an individual quest within the context of a community**, one rooted in the fundamental questions of the **meaning of life**, and that tends toward the construction of a **consistent, motivating and continually evolving vision of existence**).

Let us go over the main components of this definition in order to obtain a more precise grasp of its meaning.

➤ *An individual quest within the context of a community*

Spiritual life is a "quest" in that it takes us along a certain path, requiring us to follow a certain route or **itinerary** involving questions, search, reflection, experiments, listening to one's inner voice, delving more deeply into certain issues, etc. Spiritual life leads the individual to understand his/her true and deep-rooted nature. This route **is not linear or quick, or free of pitfalls; nor is everything mapped out in advance**. It is made up of doubts, suffering, discoveries, despair, hope, offers, acceptance, rejections and setbacks. It is "to be discovered, or rather to be welcomed when you become aware of it in your own way."<sup>22</sup> In fact, it is a path that can be both fascinating and disconcerting, and that takes various shapes over the years.

This quest is said to be "individual" because each individual must assume responsibility for his or her own itinerary. Individuals are not isolated or left to themselves, since their paths take them through the community. They are influenced by others who are on the same existential road (parents, friends) or by society (culture, religion(s), etc.). **Others and society are even indispensable** because they represent points of contact that provide meaning, inspiration, challenges, approval and support. It cannot be otherwise, since human beings are essentially social. Despite this, **at the end of this road, every individual must make his/her own choices**, since he/she "is the only discoverer of his/her kingdom."<sup>23</sup> It is up to individuals to accept or refuse offers made to them, and to shape their own itinerary and develop their own sense of integrity in a thoughtful and serious fashion, while showing good judgement and respect for

<sup>22</sup> Légaut, Marcel, *Vie spirituelle et modernité* (Paris: Centurion – Duclot), 235. [Free translation].

<sup>23</sup> René Barbier quoted by Lecanu, Jean, "Spiritualité et attitude éducative : l'école dans la relation éducative," *3e Millénaire*, 49 (1998), 80. [Free Translation].

others. Each person must dare to be free, which, in the final analysis, is an eminently individual act.

➤ *The meaning of life*

In essence, our spiritual life is rooted in **the big questions of existence** that nobody can escape: where do I come from? who am I? where am I going? why is there life, or suffering and death? All these questions refer to the very value of individuals, their dignity, their self-esteem, their perception of self and of others, their anchorage in life, their sense of time, etc. These questions also lead to the discovery of transcendence, the absolute, the source in oneself or something "more than oneself"; and they can all be asked from the perspective of "ourselves." In fact, the meaning of one's own life is closely connected with that of other people's lives, and of life in the most general sense of the word.

Sometimes we approach these questions out of purely intellectual considerations, as is usually the case during a lecture, discussion or reading. More often than not, **they arise in happy or unhappy life situations**, but always in very concrete situations. For example, they can arise from contact with nature, deep human relationships, artistic experiences or scientific discovery. They also very often emerge when individuals or communities must face difficulties such as failure, constraints, losses or breakdowns of all sorts, unpleasant life situations (e.g. injustice, violence, poverty, discrimination, war), moral or physical suffering and death. Such moments, which are invariably intense, create a void that gives rise to questions about the meaning of things. In the process, a whole world of fundamental values comes under review: love, hope, confidence, faith, perseverance, courage, transcendence, the inner world, dignity, happiness, wisdom, solidarity, altruism, truth, etc.

➤ *A coherent and motivating vision of existence*

The path through the world of meaning gradually leads the individual to **a global understanding of his/her life and of life in general**, one that brings with it answers to the big questions of life mentioned above, and does so in a unified and coherent manner. This search for a "unifying pole"<sup>24</sup> varies with each individual and culture. This desire to understand all the aspects of one's life (personal, social, universal, cosmic) and to harmonize these components is specifically human. Individuals tirelessly strive to come to know who they are, to uncover their personal mystery and to live in accordance with what they have discovered about themselves.

For centuries, humans have sought and found the various meanings of existence. This has given birth to beliefs, philosophies and religions that offer unified and coherent systems of meaning, which are the fruits of human experience down through time. A large number of these creeds are still very much alive today, while others were born more recently, but all of them can serve as springboards, reference points and destinations on one's spiritual journey.

Every individual is profoundly influenced by a belief, philosophy or religion that comes from his/her family or culture. After a rather long and complex journey, many people make these creeds the central element of their "vision" of existence, of their "spirituality," although they do so to different degrees. Others reject these received visions and develop different principles that draw on various traditions and currents of thought. Whatever people decide, their vision of existence can be built around **what is religious, around a cause** like justice or the environment,

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<sup>24</sup> Breton, Jean-Claude, *Approche contemporaines de la vie spirituelle* (Québec: Éditions Bellarmin, 1990), 17.

or **around both at once**. However, regardless of the exact nature of this vision, **it is always defined in relation to that which is not us, to what is "beyond oneself."** For most people, this takes the shape of an absolute Being, a God, an Intelligence, an Energy, etc. For some, the "beyond oneself" is nothing else but the universe and the human being in themselves (i.e. reality in all its materiality and greatness).

The vision of existence that individuals adopt for themselves (and their spiritual quest) provides them with **a basis for self-fulfilment and progress in life**. This vision is in no way static. It is motivating. It energizes, mobilizes, anchors, transforms and strengthens the individual. It enables the individual to define his/her relationship with others and the world. It opens the individual up to others and to the world, to such an extent that it can be translated into different types of commitments. In short, this vision provides the individual with greater well-being in all respects.

➤ *Continually evolving*

The preceding discussion suggests that spiritual life is something that develops gradually as a result of experiences, encounters and the times we live in. Spiritual life is characterized by **ongoing development** and **continual evolution**. Its richness depends on its ever-evolving nature.

Identifying a vision of existence does not bring the spiritual quest to an end. Even though an individual's beliefs, philosophy or religion tend to become more solid and lasting over time, they often prove to be incomplete and temporary because **there can be no final answers to the fundamental questions of life**. In fact, spiritual life "... is a very challenging question ... It forces you to take nothing for granted - neither good nor evil, neither life nor death, neither human beings nor God."<sup>25</sup> "Spiritual life takes us on an endless adventure."<sup>26</sup> Indeed each person's situation (age, experience, achievements, problems, suffering, etc.) and social environment (plurality of opinions and of ways of living, poverty, wealth, realized or unrealized aspirations, social crises and tragedies, injustice, war, etc.) have an impact on that individual's spiritual life. These factors can foster or hinder it, strengthen or undermine it, clarify or confuse it, speed it up or slow it down. It should also be pointed out that one's vision of existence itself evolves and calls other ideas into question. All of these change the perspective of the fundamental questions and create new ones, to such an extent that what was formerly seen as settled and permanent **continues to evolve**, and, if necessary, gives a new impetus to the spiritual quest. We must inevitably give our spiritual lives new momentum, which will lead us to change our vision of existence.

## THE EXPRESSION "COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT"

At the beginning of this document, involvement is introduced as a **contribution of the individual to community life** based on the **recognition of the value and dignity of human beings** and oriented toward the construction of a **more harmonious and supportive society**.

An examination of the various components of this definition will give us a better understanding of this idea.

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<sup>25</sup> Nouwen, Henri J.M., *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Powell, Robert, "Où commencer dans la vie spirituelle," *3e Millénaire*, 41(1996), 6. [Free translation]

➤ *A contribution of the individual to community life*

The Latin origin of the word contribution conveys the idea of "adding " and of "providing one's share." It suggests that community "involvement" is a matter of participation, of input and of action. It follows from this that to contribute to something, to get involved with it, means to **feel concerned about it, to make choices and to assume responsibilities.**

In this case, getting involved means doing something for the benefit of community life. The keystone of such commitment is the individual as a citizen, who feels part of a society in need for improvement and who wishes to work toward this goal with other like-minded people. The underlying assumption here is that all human beings are interdependent. Their identities, their self-fulfilment and their personal and collective humanization are possible only in society, within a framework to which they feel they belong. Everyone's contribution is thus essential for the quality of life of the individual and within society at large. It is interesting to note that the expression community life contains the word "life," which conveys not only the idea of existence, but also that of "life span," "means of existence," "way of life" and even "humankind." Thus, community life is a whole world of relationships with others that take us beyond mere coexistence toward sharing in a quality of life together.

In order to be fully educational, community involvement **must seek to ensure that the meaning of action is known and clear** to all involved and that its consequences are assessed. This is not only a matter of "doing," but also of knowing the **underlying reasons for action**, as well as its **consequences**. If people are not aware of why they are involved, their involvement runs the risk of being only random or even of perpetuating unfortunate situations that called for such intervention.

➤ *The recognition of the value and dignity of human beings*

Central to the idea of community involvement is a conviction associated with all the major humanist schools of thought, all the major religions and the various modern charters of rights: namely, that other people, **without exception, have value and human dignity**. It implies that the individual is not the be-all and end-all of everything and that all individuals and peoples surrounding that person merit the same type of consideration and the same chances to realize their potential. Those who are in some way excluded, deprived, marginalized or exploited should be the first to benefit from community involvement.

Community action consists in a **shift of focus away from oneself toward others**, with a view to building a harmonious and supportive society. Community involvement will be all the more beneficial if it helps make other people autonomous rather than dependent. It rests on the premise that what is done for others will be of benefit to the community as a whole, yet it can, at the time or after the fact, contribute to the fulfilment of the individual involved in community action. Extensive research has illustrated the psychological and physical benefits of community involvement.<sup>27</sup> Many people also agree that it is a necessary condition for **the evolution of humanity toward complete fulfilment**, since human beings can be fully human only through action and service on behalf of others.

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<sup>27</sup> Languirand, Jacques, *La voie, c'est les autres. (Par 4 chemins, spécial thématique)* (Boucherville: Éditions de Mortagne, 1990), 13 –25. [Free Translation].

Today, the recognition of others is embodied in organizations, movements and in a wide variety of groups at all levels of society. These are all spurred on by **the common good, in all its interpersonal and collective dimensions**. In other words, they promote and set up projects that improve the lot of others on the material, psychological, social and environmental planes—to take but a few examples. This type of work is carried out, in large measure, through a multitude of associations or through local, regional, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which reflect on social issues and do a wide variety of things to "improve the social fabric and the quality of life of citizens by taking action in order to bring about social change."<sup>28</sup> These community organizations are ideal places for both young people and adults to become familiar with and take part in democratic life.<sup>29</sup> Such work can also be carried out through international organizations set up by various countries or through agencies that they create in their own territory to secure fair and decent conditions for their citizens or for other peoples.

The recognition of others also extends to a **concern with the conditions in which they live**, in other words, to their quality of life in all its forms, including the fate of our planet. An excellent illustration of this aspect of community involvement is that it affects various fields, such as interpersonal and social relations, education, healthcare, democratic life and ecology. In fact, other people's fulfilment encompasses all the aspects of their existence and is inseparable from their living conditions.

➤ *A more harmonious and supportive society*

The cornerstone of community involvement is the construction of a more harmonious and supportive society. On one hand, this also means establishing **friendly and fruitful relationships** between individuals and groups; on the other hand, it refers to the establishment **of means to promote their self-fulfilment**. Community involvement deals with these two aspects. From this perspective, it is a major social transformation effort, with the individual citizen working to develop basic values, such as friendliness, openness toward others, dialogue, respect, honesty, tolerance, responsibility, good will, loyalty, compassion, service, sharing, democratic participation, equality, equity, peace, justice, freedom, etc.

If, as it has been established earlier, human beings are interdependent, the lot of others becomes as much important as our own fate. This implies the development of a **true social and planetary conscience** (that is, respectively, among people themselves, and in relation to the planet). Within the framework of such a mentality, introducing the foregoing values will lead to **universal brotherhood**. Of course, brotherhood is an ideal, but it is also a potential that can provide community involvement with thrust and motivation. This ideal is an **unavoidable challenge of the coming century**, because this is the "only realistic way of the survival of the species"<sup>30</sup> to which we all belong.

The construction of a harmonious and supportive society must target the whole human community in all its components and dimensions. In practical terms, this could mean one's **immediate community**, such as the school, neighbourhood, village or city, or the **community in a broader sense**, such as the entire country, other countries, other cultures and the world. It

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<sup>28</sup> Excerpt from la Déclaration des organismes d'action communautaire autonome (Québec: Assemblée extraordinaire du 18 avril 1998), 4 [Free Translation].

<sup>29</sup> Québec, Conseil Supérieur de l'éducation, *Éduquer à la citoyenneté*. Rapport annuel 97-98 (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1998), 82.

<sup>30</sup> Attali, Jacques, *Fraternité, une nouvelle utopie* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1999), 82. [Free translation]

confers on each of us the responsibility to live as a full citizen of one's community and the world, by gradually or swiftly working on ourselves and others, with patience, courage, tenacity, respect and an appreciation of difference

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