



# Friends of Fe y Alegría in the United States!

## Building bridges of Solidarity



Photo: Jesús Rodríguez Villaroel

The initiative, Friends of Fe y Alegría in the United States, was founded in 2014, with the goal of engaging individuals and entities in the U.S. in the educational mission of Fe y Alegría. Through this article, we share the challenges and lessons learned in our efforts to promote global citizenship and serve as a platform for collaboration with the international movement.



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The initiative, Friends of Fe y Alegría in the United States, was founded in 2014, with the goal of engaging individuals and entities in the U.S. in the educational mission of Fe y Alegría, serving as a platform to raise awareness on the importance of quality, inclusive education for the most vulnerable as well as to promote new, innovative collaborations with the international movement. Friends of Fe y Alegría is a project promoted by the International Federation of Fe y Alegría and Magis Americas, a U.S. based non-profit which was founded by the Latin American Conference of Provincials (CPAL) and the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States (JCCU) to increase and deepen collaboration on behalf of the mission of the Society of Jesus in the Americas. The initiative has also received technical support and accompaniment for elements related to project management, communication and global citizenship from the team at Fundación Entreculturas in Madrid, Spain.

### Fe y Alegría: A Global Movement

Fe y Alegría is one of the largest non-profit educational networks in Latin America and the Caribbean, with its mission also extending to Africa and Europe. For over six decades, Fe y Alegría has worked to improve the quality and accessibility of public education for the most marginalized and vulnerable. From a single school on the outskirts of Caracas, Venezuela, Fe y Alegría has grown into an international movement comprised of over 3,000 schools and community centers that annually serve over 1.5 million individuals in 22 countries. The mission of Fe y Alegría is to promote comprehensive and inclusive education processes from, with and for the communities in which we serve so as to build just and democratic systems through the transformative power of education.

Friends of Fe y Alegría emerged as a vehicle to share the impact of this international movement with a broader audience, specifically in the United States, with the goal of engaging individuals,



communities, schools, and foundations in opportunities for collaboration and exchange. The initiative has three main lines of action, which include the following: promoting global citizenship education and awareness raising on the universal right to education; developing institutional relationships for Fe y Alegría within the United States; and working together with members of Latino diaspora communities, as well as other interested individuals or groups, to support the mission of Fe y Alegría.

### Why Global Citizenship?

The support of youth-led processes and global citizenship initiatives is a key strategic priority of Fe y Alegría. Thus, the opportunity to adapt and share global education resources and methodologies with U.S. students and teachers, in addition to building spaces for mutual learning and exchange, was viewed as a chance to expand the reach of this growing movement. Our global citizenship program seeks to develop innovative partnerships and share knowledge and capacities with already existing Jesuit networks in order to promote global citizenship and solidarity in school and university contexts.

Learning from the experience of Entreculturas - Fe y Alegría Spain and its commitment to accompanying global citizenship processes with youth, teachers,



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

### Peace Action Campaign

#### Objectives:

1. Promote reflection on possible attitudes or values that can prevent violence in today's societies and the importance of building nonviolent responses to conflict resolution.
2. Encourage participants to see themselves as peacebuilders in their community by identifying daily actions that they can put into practice to promote peace building skills in their environments.

#### Tasks:

- ↘ Students develop an advocacy campaign promoting peacebuilding skills within their school community.
- ↘ Students will create a slogan, a written plan, and provide an artistic presentation using any art form they choose to advocate for a specific value in their community that fosters nonviolence and peacebuilding.
- ↘ Students and teachers will follow the attached rubric for evaluation guidelines.

#### Duration:

This activity will take place over at least two sessions of one hour each.

#### Materials:

- ↘ Evaluation sheet.
- ↘ Campaign Planning sheet.

#### Activity Session 1:

Through this lesson plan, we invite students to design an advocacy campaign promoting peacebuilding skills and equality within their school community that will also take into account their role as global citizens.

First, discuss the following questions together:

- ↘ What is peace for you? Why is it important for youth to talk about this topic?
- ↘ We know that some countries are suffering from violent conflicts right now, but in our community, we also see attitudes that lead to violent conflicts instead of peaceful resolutions. What are some examples of those conflicts that we see in our community?

Discuss these questions as a large group, while recording the students' answers on the board to use as reflection tools and ideas throughout the session.

Next, invite students to reflect on the following questions:

- ↘ What do you think are some of the attitudes that make people resort to violence instead of using peaceful ways to resolve conflicts?
- ↘ What are values/attitudes that foster nonviolent resolution to conflicts?

Have students sort the attitudes on a chart with partners then share as a class.

Present the campaign planning page in which students will read the requirements for designing their own advocacy campaign in small groups. Invite them to choose a word from the chart to use as inspiration for their campaign (a specific value/attitude they would like to promote in their community). Encourage them to also choose a specific topic to focus on such as environmental issues/climate change, social inequality/poverty, or gender inequalities. Spend a few minutes explaining and discussing examples, then, students can start thinking of a goal they have and an activity they would like to plan as homework using the planning page.

#### Activity Session 2:

Review the guidelines to follow for the design of an advocacy and awareness-raising campaign and explain the sections to be completed. Then, break up into small groups. Students share their ideas with the other group participants and collaborate in developing an idea for a campaign that fosters peacebuilding and develop their thoughts on the provided planning sheets. A few groups will share their project ideas. Planning sheets will be collected at the end of the session and teachers can use the evaluation criteria to select the winning project.

#### Campaign Guidelines

- ↘ The activity must have a written and an arts-based presentation.
- ↘ The activity should include one of these three main topics: care for the environment, social inequality, gender equality.
- ↘ The activity must promote inclusiveness and participation of all groups and members of the community (schools, friends, parents, neighbors, social organizations).
- ↘ The activity will not raise funds as a main goal, but rather focus on reflection and the promotion of values and attitudes to foster a culture of peace and non-violence in the participant's community.
- ↘ Although the activity involves local action, it will also keep in mind a desired global impact.

#### Campaign Planning Guide

1. Name of campaign organizers.
2. Peace-building attitude chosen to promote.
3. Goal.
4. Slogan.
5. Description of your campaign. Include at least three tasks or steps to plan your final presentation.
6. How will your campaign bring global peace and non-violence awareness to your community?
7. How will you involve other members of your school and community?
8. Materials needed.
9. Timeline for your campaign.



and faculty in over 800 schools, Friends of Fe y Alegría seeks to help schools and teachers in the U.S. prepare young people to understand the root causes of inequality, exclusion and injustice and develop the values and attitudes necessary to take action. To do so, we propose three areas of action:

1. Stimulate critical thinking and promote youth engagement on global social justice issues through the adaptation and development of curriculum resources.
2. Support schools in promoting greater awareness of poverty and sustainable development issues through the design and implementation of awareness-raising and communication campaigns, such as “La Silla Roja” (The Red Chair Project) or “La Luz de las Niñas” (The light within girls).
3. Enable students and teachers to learn more about the reality of education and youth solidarity movements through participation in immersion experiences to Fe y Alegría sites in Latin America.

There is no doubt that young people play a crucial role in building more just and equitable communities and can contribute to promoting solidarity, mutual learning, and action for social justice. However, it is vital that we create supportive and empowering environments for youth that encourage global citizenship and participation to address these inequalities.

### **La Silla Roja: A Collaborative Experience**

One of the most important milestones in the area of global citizenship for Friends of Fe y Alegría has been the adaptation and launch of “La Silla Roja” campaign, an initiative that seeks to defend the right to quality, inclusive education for the more than 264 million children and youth who are currently unable to attend school worldwide.

La Silla Roja was originally launched in 2012 by a Jesuit school in the north of



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Spain and then shared with more schools through our partners at Entreculturas. Since then, the campaign has spread to at least 30 Jesuit schools around the world. Starting in 2016, Friends of Fe y Alegría worked in collaboration with the Jesuit Schools Network and Educate Magis to share the campaign with schools across the United States. Through the campaign, students and teachers are invited to paint a school chair red, and place it in a visible location around campus or in their classroom, as a symbol to raise awareness about the lack of access to educational opportunities, especially for vulnerable communities. The empty red chair represents this lack of access but it also serves as a daily reminder and a call to reflect on the importance of education in our own lives and to defend this right for others. Through easy-to-use, adaptable lesson plans, in English and Spanish, students are challenged to recognize their co-responsibility and the role they play in the construction of a society where human dignity and solidarity are cherished. Students at schools such as Saint Ignatius High School in Cleveland or Georgetown





Photo: Jesús Rodríguez Villaroel

Preparatory School outside of Washington, D.C. have used campaigns such as La Silla Roja to make global education realities more local and concrete for their school communities.

### Venezuela: Schools of the Future

As part of its mission, Friends of Fe y Alegría has actively engaged over the past five years in the creation of communities of solidarity, spaces to promote cross-border collaboration between Latinos living in the U.S. and their countries of origin. According to *The Dialogue*, family remittances in Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced nearly a 10% growth rate in 2018, one of the largest in the past 10 years. US Latinos are continually looking for ways to support their families, and Friends of Fe y Alegría seeks to serve as a platform for this type of collaboration. As part of this line of action, a key milestone in Friends of Fe y Alegría's story includes the design and implementation of the Schools of the Future: School Nutrition Program, together with Fe y Alegría Venezuela. Starting in 2016, the original objective of Schools of the Future was to

improve the nutrition of more than 1,000 students at two Fe y Alegría schools in eastern Venezuela. Through this program, Fe y Alegría aims to not only improve the health of its students, but to also improve school attendance rates and the learning abilities of its students.

Since November 2016, over 1,379,680 breakfasts and lunches have been served to over 1,550 students, parents and personnel. In that same time period, students have seen their health metrics improve, academic performance has progressed, and attendance rates are up from where they were four years ago.

While many advances have been achieved through the implementation of this intervention, though, the school communities still largely suffer the effects of the humanitarian and economic crises plaguing Venezuela, and there is still much work to be done. However, the effectiveness and impact of this intervention is clear. A pilot project which started in two rural schools in eastern Venezuela has grown into a national priority for Fe y Alegría, with the program operating in over 40 rural and urban schools.

## The way forward

Since 2014, Friends of Fe y Alegría has seen steady growth and continues to consolidate its presence in the U.S., building relationships with the educational community and Latino Diaspora communities that will help contribute to its long-term sustainability. Moving forward Friends of Fe y Alegría will take a more active role to consolidate its presence as a project of Magis Americas.

Including funds received under the Friends of Fe y Alegría banner, Magis Americas mobilized over \$1.34 million dollars in 2018, collaborating with seven countries where Fe y Alegría is present, as well as supporting other entities and networks of the Society of Jesus in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, an increasingly-competitive donor market, and increased economic and political instability in Latin America and the Caribbean, mark challenges for the coming years.

In the area of global citizenship, we seek to build on lessons learned from our experience, which include the following:

1. In order to have a real impact, global citizenship needs to be clearly defined and understood as a priority by administrators and teachers and viewed as an integral part of the school's mission.
2. Students are oftentimes the active promoters of our campaigns and projects, key to ensuring that they view themselves as agents of social transformation. However, in order to ensure

3. Global justice education requires the dedication of resources, as well as the ongoing accompaniment of schools and the evaluation of processes in order to achieve greater impact.
4. The design of global citizenship resources and activities must be carried out in constant collaboration with teachers and educational networks to ensure they are relevant and appropriate to the context of today's students.
5. Generating connections and building horizontal relationships between schools, based on mutual trust, is a slow process that requires patience, openness, creativity and flexibility.

Incorporating these lessons learned, Friends of Fe y Alegría hopes that our efforts to promote global citizenship and cultures of peace and equality will continue to bear fruit, and that our work will enable Magis Americas to develop into a sustainable international development organization that contributes to the global mission of the Society of Jesus •

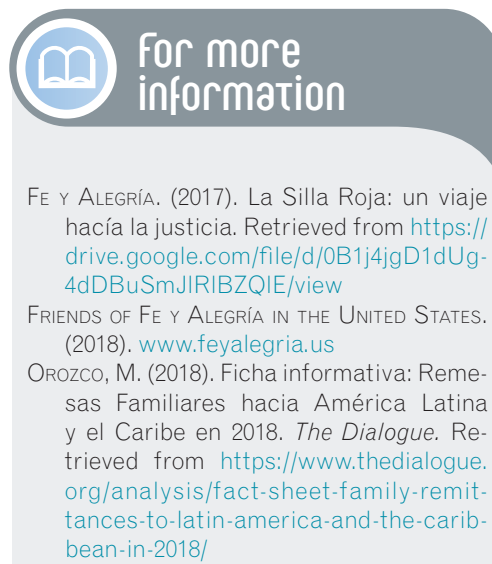


Spanish version



**We have been talking about**  
**Global citizenship; solidarity; cultures of peace; Latino diaspora.**

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**For more information**

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