



FLORIMONT: OUR CORE VALUES

Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales



INSTITUT

florimont



St. Francis de Sales
18th century German school
Institut Florimont, Geneva

FLORIMONT: OUR CORE VALUES

Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales

Geneva, August 2023



MISSIONARIES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, FRANCE-SWITZERLAND PROVINCE

On its foundation in 1905 by the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, Institut Florimont was placed under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and Doctor of the Church (1567-1622).

The Institut has the human, educational, technological and cultural resources, and a place of worship, where we can experience truth in our relationships - becoming a manifestation of God's Love by nurturing our "shared home".

Kindness and mutual respect are central to life at Florimont; these qualities reflect our school's diversity through the unity of faith.

The deep connectedness and communion of faith and charity between us are the essence of showing belief in the Gospel. If we do not appreciate their value, how can we join the inter-faith dialogue that is becoming ever more urgent and necessary?

Bear in mind too that ecumenical commitment is not optional; it is part of how we respond to the Lord's commandment:
"Be one, as I and my Father are one, so the world may believe".

Rather than a list of directives, this document can be used as a guide that gives meaning to every aspect of life at Institut Florimont. We do not hold a position of power, we do not run society, our humanity is no different from that of our contemporaries - but we are responsible for the way we live in this world, serving every human and all humankind.

"God is the God of the human heart"

Every person has divine value in his eyes.
St. Francis de Sales

Annecy
16 June 2023
Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Fr. Jean-Yves Le Tué
Provincial Superior

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1. ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, FLORIMONT'S PATRON

St. Francis de Sales was born in 1567, five years after the death of Calvin, and ordained bishop three days before the historic Escalade that triggered Geneva's independence from the Savoyard states. He died in 1622, having just returned from a diplomatic mission.

1.1 Francis de Sales was marked by the era in which he lived, a time of political, religious, social and economic upheaval:

- Local and European war was causing violence, misery and insecurity;
- Christians were divided, raging against each other as they attempted to define a single model of Christianity;
- Galileo was condemned by the Church;¹
- the vulnerable and the poor, who were victims of events far beyond their control, suffered the greatest hardships.

People were desperately seeking a new way of life in this turmoil.

1.2 A lawyer by training, later a priest and then bishop, Francis de Sales experienced the troubles of these times with clear-headedness. His power of thought, his humanity and optimism stemmed from two personal crises he had faced in his youth: the first being freedom before

1 The preliminary hearings on Galileo were held in Rome between 1615 and 1623. Francis de Sales approved of his work and sided with Galileo, coming to the defence of Baranzano, a monk who supported the theories of Copernicus and Galileo. Copernican heliocentrism sparked a crisis in theology and critical interpretation, with Baranzano writing: "What is affirmed in the Holy Scripture by ignorant, profane men or naturalist philosophers has no authority other than that of its authors ... the Scripture talks about things in nature according to our capacity and based on the opinion of men.", E-J Lajeunie: *St Francis de Sales: l'homme, la pensée, l'action*. Ed. Guy Victor, Paris, 1966, volume 2 p. 92

God's will on human destiny; the second, the powerful temptations of the worldly tastes and pleasures of student life.

1.3 Deeply uncertain about his future, St Francis had choices to make. He found his path when he discovered the highest degree of love that he called “**charity**” and “**devotion**”. By educating the heart, which he referred to as human “**sanctuary**” or “**the pinnacle of the soul**”, he formed a view of mankind that went beyond the acquisition of knowledge.

1.4 The power of his influence comes from his belief that every human being has the vocation to be holy and dwell in God's presence, both within the family and more widely in society.

1.5 Everyone, from Pope and bishop to prince and pauper, was drawn to St Francis' sense of the human person and sought his guidance on opening new paths and resolving conflict.² He brought together highly educated men in the **Académie Florimontane** (origin of the name Florimont) for open discussion, sharing their wisdom in the wider world.

1.6 St Francis' understanding of the human heart made him an originator, a mediator and a guide of souls; he became known as the “**Doctor of divine love**”, the “**eagle of gentleness**” and the “**creator of peace**”.

² His encounters with Théodore de Bèze were conducted in the spirit of full mutual respect.

St Francis de Sales believed that to create harmony and unity, we must respect difference.

1.7 For music to be pleasant, the voices must not only be true, clear and distinct from one another, but also united together in such a way that there may arise a just consonance and harmony.³

2. FLORIMONT TODAY

Uncertainty growing in our ever-changing world

2.1 In today's pluralist and conflicted world, with cultures at risk of being standardised by the influence of globalisation, tradition bears the scars of political, social and economic events. Institut Florimont can find **pointers**, in the spirit of St Francis de Sales, to help today's young people **face their problems and find a way of life in which they can learn and hope.**

2.2 Like all schools, Florimont is constantly being presented with new situations. The rapid changes of the modern age threaten the principle of authority; looking back to tradition does not give us the answers we seek to today's problems. An added instability in young people's lives is the weakening family structure. The relationships they foster, whether close or distant, and events they see occurring around the world show them that simply applying past solutions is no longer enough.

3 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book I, chapter I

2.3 As they witness these societal changes, young people are also going through a biological, emotional, spiritual and intellectual transformation. Despite the rapid advances in science, technology and communication, the gap between individuals and populations, and between humanity and nature, is widening. To the young, the future does not always look bright or certain.

2.4 Florimont aims to **spark children's interest in projects that inspire hope for a better world** and develop their **ability to choose and follow personal beliefs**.

3. OUR OBJECTIVES

To help young people find their place in the world

3.1 Institut Florimont is enriched by the values handed down through the generations, and by its capacity to stand firm in the face of challenge. Under St Francis de Sales' patronage, the Institut draws on its traditional Christian resources, inspired by Salesian values.

3.2 Passing on these values is part of a **dynamic tradition**: supporting students' deepest aspirations, linked to their growth and social background; being challenged by world events, accelerating in many domains, and by the ever-widening gap between individuals and communities; constantly revisiting recommended points of reference from a collective standpoint, and how to view them.

3.3 As a private Catholic school, Institut Florimont's objectives are in keeping with the view of an established local Church (in Geneva and in the diocese) and an education open to many faiths and cultures.

Its **mission** is to translate this spirit of openness and dialogue into actively training young people in their duties as humans and Christians.

3.4 Institut Florimont intends to pass on to its students the spiritual and human values⁴ of an **education** that develops all their abilities. This education prepares each student not just for academic success but to serve the development of every person and all humankind.

4. FLORIMONT: WHERE WE GROW AND ADAPT TO CHANGE

4.1 Understanding one another

A young person grows ... from the change they experience.

4.1.1 Having limitless possibilities creates confusion and presents human beings with tough choices. Bombarded as they are with images of “perfection”, young people can lose faith in themselves and in their potential. Social status in particular is no longer a lasting value.

4 See chapter 5

4.1.2 Like all young people, Florimont students turn to mass culture to find the things that resonate with them, such as music, clothes, food and drink; they are looking as much for an identity as places where they belong. It seems to be increasingly hard to just be yourself, and this sometimes comes out as cynical or tough behaviour - but everyone has the right to dream about their future: without this right, life loses its meaning. Rebellion and violence can be interpreted both as a lament for lost hope and the need for hope.

*Rose bushes first produce thorns and then roses.*⁵

*We must continue cultivating as there is no more thankless a field than that neglected by the ploughman.*⁶

Institut Florimont wants to help a student grow by getting them to see the other person as having their own mystery, a person equally worthy of love in spite of their faults, weaknesses and upheavals.

4.2 A place where relationships develop

... a relationship built on recognition and acceptance.

4.2.1 Institut Florimont wants to be a place and time where a young person acquires the essential tools for building a “**way of life**”. They cannot do it alone; they must have access to an environment in which

5 Francis de Sales: Letter to Don Juste Guérin, Barnabite, April 1618, E.A. Book XVIII, p. 213

6 Francis de Sales: Letter to Monsignor Jean-Pierre Camus, Bishop of Belley, 7 March 1611, E.A. Book XV, p. 28

they can find within themselves and around them what they need to develop both as individuals and collectively, looking to the future with children and adults alike.

4.2.2 In this search for meaning, teachers, educators and students are in a relationship of mutual recognition. The subjects taught, individual experience and the setting provide countless opportunities for discovering and understanding the values that form the dignity of every human being. The issue is being aware that **some ways of experiencing these values are causing them to disappear, while other ways of living these values are emerging.**

4.2.3 No topic is unworthy of debate in the interest of exercising judgement and giving people an opportunity to explore their beliefs; students and teachers must have time and space for discussion. In the spirit of critical discernment and competition, they can accept to change their point of view, start in a new direction and contribute to a better future for everyone.

4.2.4 All human beings are blessed with the power and freedom to interpret both humanity's history and our own: that is what truly makes us players. From the Christian perspective, this gift comes from God and is guaranteed by Him.

We are not drawn to God by chains of iron, like bulls or oxen, but by invitations, enticements and holy inspirations; these are the cords of Adam and of human kindness; rightly befitting the human heart, which is naturally free. We are able, before all its might, to consent

*to or resist its promptings at our pleasure.*⁷

4.2.5 The human being, beloved by God, has inestimable value in His eyes. In response to this love, he has to discover the true value of being human and accept the responsibility of making choices. This is the attitude of a believer; to a Christian, this means standing in faith before God, who created the world out of love, and who asks us to continue creating with Him.

*We are only what we are before God.*⁸

*God is God of the human heart.*⁹

*Let us be who we are and be that well, so that we may bring honour to the Master Craftsman who has made us.*¹⁰

4.3 Teaching within the student-teacher relationship

Mutual motivation and competition

4.3.1 “Teaching means taking the learner down a dark, difficult path with the promise that it is leading somewhere, gaining the trust of the person being led.”¹¹

7 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book 2, chap. 12 – La Pléiade edition, p. 444 - 445

8 Francis de Sales: Letter to Canon Louis de Sales, 26 March 1599, E.A. Book XII, p. 6

9 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book 1, chap. 15 – La Pléiade edition, p. 395

10 Francis de Sales: Letter to Présidente Brulart, 10 June 1605, E.A. Book XIII, p. 53

11 H.-J. Gagey: La nouvelle donne pastorale. Ed. de l'Atelier, Paris, 1999, p. 56

4.3.2 Teaching is embarking on a journey with another person in search of a truth as yet unreached. Teaching means students and teachers working together to find a **way of instructing and learning**. As part of ongoing changes, it means applying the wisdom of lessons learnt from tradition to build the future, in light of new points of reference.

*We must not stop at good when we can do better.*¹²

*Let us always keep on: however slow our progress, we are moving along the path.*¹³

*Great plans only come from patience and the slow passage of time. Things that grow in one day can be lost the next.*¹⁴

4.3.3 In teaching, we acknowledge that the path taken is imperfect; we enter into a humble relationship with the student that takes us out of ourselves; only the learner has the power to make sense of what he is learning.

*There is no person in the world of such wisdom or fairness as to be above censure.*¹⁵

¹² Francis de Sales: Letter to Antoine d'Avully, 30 September 1605, E.A. Book XIII, p. 102

¹³ Francis de Sales: Letter to Baroness de Chantal, 6 August 1606, E.A. Book XIII, p. 202

¹⁴ Francis de Sales: Letter to Madame Bourgeois, Abbess of Puits-d'Orbe, 9 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 339

¹⁵ Francis de Sales: Letter to Duke of Savoy, Charles-Emmanuel I, 11 July 1619, E.A. Book XVIII, p. 408

This relationship protects us from believing that we are the authors of our own origins. It unites us all in God's family.

*Wherever you cannot walk, God will carry you.*¹⁶

4.4 Student-teacher relationship built on openness to dialogue and collaboration

Developing skills

4.4.1 The preferred way to support the student-teacher relationship is to encourage openness to dialogue, which assumes being true to oneself and acknowledging difference in others.

Teachers and students are expected to adopt certain attitudes as conditions of this dialogue.

4.4.2 The teacher must have:

- The ability to exercise freedom from one's own points of reference.
- The capacity to propose a path to the student that reveals their abilities.
- Openness about the student's future not limited to their current performance and situation.
- A willingness to listen and hear the calls, the dismay, the dreams, frailties and desires of each student with no ulterior motive. The teacher is expected to refrain from judgement or pre-formed certainty.

¹⁶ Francis de Sales: Letter to Madame de Veyssillieu, 16 January 1619, E.A. Book XVIII, p. 344

4.4.3 The student must be:

- Willing to follow the proposed path, and be given the freedom to express how they receive this proposal.
- Willing to listen to proposals and comments in order to discern the truth for themselves. By expressing their desires, attitudes and abilities, the student will be encouraged to make any necessary changes.
- Ready to discover in himself and others the positive elements and limitations that make a future. This will prevent him from being inhibited by his failures or from inhibiting others through their weaknesses.

The young run towards far-off problems and flee from those nearby.

¹⁷

Be content to start with small steps till you have legs to run, better still wings to fly. ¹⁸

Whoever seeks a brother without fault would never have a brother. ¹⁹

Overcoming obstacles: seizing opportunities

There is temptation around every corner:

4.4.4 Seeking to take control of a situation by hiding one's insecurities, or concealing one's weaknesses and fears:

¹⁷ Francis de Sales: Letter to Mr. Antoine des Hayes, 13 April 1611, E.A. Book XV, p. 44

¹⁸ Francis de Sales: Letter to Sister de Morville, nun at the Visitation de Moulins, September 1620, E.A. Book XIX, p. 332

¹⁹ Djalâl-ud-Dîn Rûmî in: Paroles soufies, collected by Sylvia Lipa Lacarrière, Albin Michel, Paris, 1996, page 19

- for the educator, resorting to tradition and using it as an explanation for everything;
- for the student, limiting themselves to their own experiences or temporary methods.

4.4.5 In contrast, fixing firmly on the future; being tempted to construct a roadmap for what lies ahead and preparing for every pitfall. Showing a lack of serious and critical analysis at the risk of falling into the perspective that everything is of value, without absolute value.

4.4.6 Obstacles are inevitable. They also present an opportunity for growth: overcoming obstacles teaches us about ourselves, encouraging us to apply new skills.

*Is it better to have thorns in our garden in order to have roses, or not to grow roses so as to avoid thorns?*²⁰

*The height of virtue is correcting immoderation moderately.*²¹

5. A VIEW OF HUMANKIND

5.1 A commitment to love

5.1.1 Knowledge and will are the two faculties vital to mankind; the purpose of knowledge is to seek and find what is good. It is important to know that different good things exist and to be able to discern their

20 Francis de Sales: Letter to Mother Superior de Chastel, Visitation de Grenoble, 16 May 1620, E.A. Book XIX, p. 201

21 Francis de Sales: Letter to Mr. Bénigne Milletot, October 1611, E.A. Book XV, p. 114

value and soundness. But the aim is not to know just for the sake of knowing. The good things I know set in motion my will - my capacity to choose freely - so I can live in greater union with this good thing. **Therefore the aim is to love - in other words, to make choices and direct my life according to those choices.**

*5.1.2 Human will, perceiving and feeling the good, by the help of the understanding which proposes it, feels at the same time a sudden delight and complacency at this meeting, which sweetly yet powerfully moves it towards this pleasing object in order to unite itself with it; and search out the means most proper to attain this union.*²²

*5.1.3 Love is a movement, an effusion and a step from the heart towards goodness.*²³

*5.1.4 He who desires love ardently shall shortly love with ardour.*²⁴

5.1.5 Everything in existence is struggling with love. Without love, nothing remains. Young people want to believe in it but are mired in doubt: is love possible? The journey towards human kindness takes us through love, and it is love that allows us to believe in mankind and in ourselves.

22 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book I, chap. 7, La Pléiade edition p. 369

23 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book I2, chap. 2, La Pléiade edition p. 951

24 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book I2, chap. 2, La Pléiade edition p. 951

*5.1.6 If I speak in the tongues of men or angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. [...] Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrong. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*²⁵

5.1.7 Love is a gift, a gift from God. God is the face of love. He made us in His image. This love asks to be received so as to be acknowledged.

*5.1.8 The Lord passed in front of Moses, proclaiming: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”*²⁶

5.2 Showing love through action: solidarity

5.2.1 Every person must find their own path to humanity. To be acknowledged for their human dignity, they need to be loved. If there is no option for the poorest, smallest or weakest of us, people lose their human dignity and an institution loses its calling. **Love begins**

25 1 Co 13,1-2.4-6

26 Exodus 34, 6-7

to act through solidarity at a local and international level. Solidarity is one of Institut Florimont's most precious values.

*5.2.2 God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*²⁷

5.2.3 The flood into countries of men and women who are suffering due to unemployment, poverty or violation of their rights is an opportunity for us all to be more aware how we belong to one human family.

*My people's heart is almost all mine.*²⁸

*If I did not love the poor, it would be to me as to not love God.*²⁹

5.3 A commitment to hope

5.3.1 If the world is loved by God and if Man is made "in His image"³⁰, there is hope – against all hope – that all men are called to become one within the same love.

²⁷ I Co 12, 25 - 27

²⁸ Francis de Sales: quotation on a stained glass window in the Basilica of the Visitation d'Annecy

²⁹ Jeanne de Chantal: quotation on a stained glass window in the Basilica of the Visitation d'Annecy

³⁰ Gen 1, 27

5.3.2 *I live, now not I, but man lives in me. To me, to live is man, and to die for man is gain. My life is hidden with man in God. [...] So has the love of man ravished God, and drawn him into an ecstasy.*³¹

5.3.3 Institut Florimont hopes to play its part in building a better, fairer and more humane world through its intercultural, interfaith and international outlook, in harmony with other religions and in solidarity with all people. **The art of hoping is ours to invent.**

5.3.4 Love has nothing to prove; it carries us, it sparks innovation, it is the source of human connection. Without love, there is no communication. It is the reason for hope. It is the foundation of all education.

5.3.5 *In order to speak well, it is enough to love well.*³²

5.3.6 *It has been well said that the heart speaks to the heart, whereas the tongue speaks only to the ears.*³³

5.3.7 *With love, nothing is impossible.*³⁴

Everything from love, not from force.³⁵

31 Francis de Sales: Treatise on the Love of God, Book 10, chap. 17, La Pléiade edition p. 866

32 Francis de Sales: Letter to Mgr Frémyot, 5 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 324

33 Francis de Sales: Letter to Mgr Frémyot, 5 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 321

34 Francis de Sales: Letter to Mgr Frémyot, 5 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 324

35 Francis de Sales: Letter to Baroness de Chantal., 14 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 359

36 Francis de Sales: Letter to Baroness de Chantal., 14 October 1604, E.A. Book XII, p. 359