

**“Beyond the School”: Alumni, mission space**

**Message of Fr. Edward Fassett, S.J. – Secretary for Collaboration – Curia Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù – to the 2017 Congress of OMAEC**

Ignatius Loyola and his nine companions had no intention of establishing colleges and universities when they founded the Society of Jesus in 1540. They saw themselves as itinerant preachers, lecturers on sacred subjects, hearers of confession and givers of spiritual counsel, teachers of catechism to the unlettered young, helpers of the poor and the sick. However, they were all master’s degree recipients from the University of Paris and they were formed by a spirituality that led them to prefer the ministry of the word. That preference disposed them to accept the care of schools when, unexpectedly, the opportunity was offered to them. In time education was to become our characteristic work. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises are about prayerful reflection and decision. Those who make them are helped to be aware of how God is acting in their lives and to choose what to do in response. This is the pedagogy of the heart, a pedagogy of spiritual formation and of action. But it opens one to a reverence for all of God’s gifts, and Ignatius taught his friends and followers to have a special reverence for intelligence and for learning.

The first Jesuits founded colleges to educate the young men who were coming to join the new Society. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find benefactors for these early colleges, especially since there seemed to be no hope that the children of the benefactors might have the opportunity to attend these schools. But when, in 1547, Ignatius was asked to open a school in Messina, Sicily, for young men who were not Jesuits, he seems to have seen the opportunity as a means of solving a financial problem as well as a powerful means of forming the minds and souls of young men. To fulfill the overall mission of the Society of Jesus ... to bring people to God ... he sought to form those who in turn would form or influence many others.

By the death of Ignatius in 1556 there were 35 Jesuit colleges (we would call them secondary schools today) across Europe. Two hundred years later there would be more than 800 in both the Old and New Worlds.

With the decrees of the Second Vatican Council and of the 31<sup>st</sup> (1965) and 32<sup>nd</sup> (1975) General Congregations of the Society of Jesus, Jesuit schools were profoundly renewed. The humanist tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, nurtured by Ignatian spirituality, was expressed anew both prophetically and lucidly by Fr. General Arrupe and by Fr. General Kolvenbach, who stated that the purpose of a Jesuit education is to train men and women for others ... and with others.

In the US, in 1970s, the first network of Jesuit high schools, the Jesuit Secondary Education Association, was born. One of the seminal documents created by the Association is called “The Profile of the Graduate of a Jesuit High School at Graduation.” While recognizing that high school students are on a threshold between adolescence and adulthood, the profile suggests that graduates are well on their way to becoming influential citizens in the world who reflect five main criteria: They are Open to Growth, Intellectually Competent, Loving, Religious, and Committed to Doing Justice.

Later, the Society re-articulated these educational objective in terms of what we call the 4 “C”s. Fr. General Kolvenbach suggested that we are looking for human excellence in our students by training them to be men and women of conscience, competence, and compassionate commitment. Thus, academic excellence, a fundamental dimension in Jesuit schools, was placed within the context of training for integral human excellence. It is this integral human excellence that gives purpose to academic excellence.

Through the years our educational program has also been renewed through the focus on an education for faith that promotes justice, encouraging dialogue between cultures and collaboration between laypeople and Jesuits. Sharing our educational charism with laypeople and religious men and women from other faith traditions has been a source of creative renewal of our educational model. New institutional models, born to offer quality education to the poor and excluded, such as Fe y Alegría in Latin America and Africa, and Cristo Rey High Schools and Nativity Middle Schools in the US, in addition to the educational services offered by the Jesuit Refugee Services, enrich the Society of Jesus’ educational apostolate in the world.

But what about those parts of the world that are hostile to Christianity ... or perhaps might even be post-Christian. The desired outcome of a classic humanistic education is to develop a good citizen who will contribute to the common good, regardless of that person’s faith. The early Jesuits combined the elements of humanistic education with the elements of scholastic education, demanding the excellence of the latter and at the same time esteeming the former ... acknowledging the potential of poetry, oratory, and drama to elicit and foster noble sentiments and ideals, especially in younger children; they believed in the potential of a humanistic education to foster *pietas*, that is, good character. These values are still important today and our schools still strive to develop good character even in places where we cannot directly teach our Catholic tradition.

So what does all of this have to do with alumni of Jesuit schools ... or Catholic schools in general? If St. Ignatius was correct in his thinking ... that to further the overall mission of the Society of Jesus ... to bring people to God ... he sought to form those who in turn would form or influence many others ... then it falls to our alumni to have that influence ... to make a difference. Today we believe that collaboration with others is essential to our mission ... that the call for collaboration is a strategic decision. We recognize that we can do far more for the proclamation of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of God when we work with others. And the idea of collaboration is rooted in who we are as Christians ... beyond who we are as alumni of Catholic schools. The decree *Lumen Gentium* of the Second Vatican Council reminds us that all of the baptized have a responsibility to proclaim the Gospel. The theme for this Congress is “People and Values to Transform the Society.” We hope that our alumni, and the alumni of all Catholic schools, will be those people who have those values that can transform Society.

In my work as Secretary of Collaboration, my charge is to be an animator for collaboration throughout the Society of Jesus. This collaboration takes place within the works of the Society of Jesus ... but it also take place through networking with other similar types of works ... between schools (Jesuit and non-Jesuit), between schools and parishes, between schools and universities. One of my biggest challenges is dealing with the concept of collaboration itself ... because the word has different meanings throughout the world. I believe that Jesuits have a duty to invite

others to collaborate with us ... to work with us in our apostolates ... but we also have a duty to collaborate with others outside our own works, to be participants in projects where we are not in charge. I describe collaboration always in terms of participants and outcomes. Collaboration is always “with” someone else ... and “for” a specific outcome. In the “big picture,” this outcome should always be the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. But in the short term, there might be other values or goals that are worthy of our focus and our energy. I would like to believe that Catholic alumni can help the Church in her proclamation of the Kingdom through her educational mission. But I also believe that Catholic alumni can invite our educational institutions to collaborate with them in projects outside the world of education that are also means of proclamation.

For example ... only recently have we begun to take advantage of the digital world as a meaningful tool for collaboration in our schools. The Internet, social media, the availability of personal hand-held devices that create virtual connections between people and schools, all offer opportunities to develop collaborative efforts beyond our traditional “bricks and mortar” structures ... and beyond geographical limits. These connections, these opportunities for developing relationships between people, are all open to the possibility of proclamation ... of announcing the Good News. Saint Ignatius reminds us that all things have been given to us as means to help us develop our relationship with God.

In the end, my hope is that the alumni of Catholic schools, like all of the People of God, will continue to recognize their baptismal responsibility to be active participants in the proclamation of the Gospel. I believe that our Catholic schools will always benefit from the time, talent, and treasure that our alumni give to us to assist in our work. I hope that more people (more alumni) will recognize that together we are contributing to the universal mission of the Church ... the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. We may use different means for that proclamation ... but in the end, we are working together to fulfill that universal mission.

Thank you for all that you do for our schools and may God continue to bless you in your work in OMAEC. Happy Anniversary.