Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 34 Article 14

10-1-2008

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Recommended Citation

 $Kahan, Tracey \ (2008) \ "The \ Education \ of \ a \ Heart," \ {\it Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education:} \ Vol. \ 34, Article \ 14. \ Available \ at: \ http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol34/iss1/14$

THE EDUCATION OF A HEART

By Tracey Kahan

efore coming to Santa Clara University in 1990, I was a member of the Loyola Marymount University community for three years. I initially sought the LMU position on the recommendation of a student who was in a graduate course I was teaching at UC Riverside. As an LMU alum, she offered that my commitment to teaching and mentoring students was consonant with LMU's emphasis on quality, values-centered undergraduate education. Not being Catholic-and having traversed the state educational systems solely, I knew nothing of the Jesuit tradition in higher education, nor had I ever met a Jesuit.

Looking back, I realize how fitting it is that my "formation" as an educator - really as a whole person should have been initiated by a student recently graduated from a Jesuit university. At LMU, I was introduced to the concept of *integrated* education — educating the heart as well as the mind- by engaging students (and ourselves) in a discovery process that integrates rigorous inquiry and direct experience. The unique opportunities — professional and personal — afforded by involvement with Jesuit higher education were first revealed to me during an immersion trip to Nicaragua in 1989.

At this time, the US-subsidized contra war within Nicaragua was winding down and the grass-roots, revolutionary Sandinista government was in power. As members of an educational delegation from LMU, we met with cabinet ministers as well as with community activists and spokespersons of cooperatives for education, textile production, and farming. No matter that this was one of the poorest countries in the world, as measured by Western material standards - the energy of hope was palpable and pervasive.

I particularly remember our visit to a farming cooperative near Leon. We arrived in the heat of the noon hour and it took some time for the workers to arrive from the fields. We had time to study the newly built medical clinic and the Russian-built farm equipment. Having stopped in at their modest one-room homes, each person arrived to the outdoor meeting place carrying a beautiful, hand-carved cane chair. These chairs were placed in a large circle and we, the guests, were invited to sit. Only the community spokesperson took a chair with us. From here, we were offered slices of fresh watermelon before the discussion of life in the coopera-

tive commenced. I was deeply moved by the generosity, pride, strength, and vision of these people and came away from this visit both humbled and inspired. The Nicaraguan people believed that we, a small delegation of educators from America, could help change the policies of our country through our witness to the truth of

As much as I flourished at LMU, I am a mountain person at heart and did not feel at home in Los Angeles, even for having grown up in Southern California. When a position in the psychology department at Santa Clara University opened up, I applied, believing that at SCU I would have the opportunity to combine a vocation in Jesuit higher education with greater access to the wild, natural places that inspire and energize my life. I was thrilled when the department chair called to offer me the position. During my years at SCU, I have become good friends with a number of Jesuits and progressively more intrigued.

hat was the wellspring of joy, integrity, and compassion each expressed in his own way? Certainly, I have known others whose lives are centered by their particular faith - but the Jesuits seemed somehow to more fully embody their faith, and also to be genuinely interested in, and inclusive of, people from different backgrounds and faith traditions.

Even as a non-Catholic woman, I was invited to become a "companion on the journey" -in exploration of faith, vocation, meaning, and the challenge to discover "where my gifts meet the world's greatest need. I was welcomed into the intimate process of discerning what my heart is calling me towards. I was welcomed as a participant in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, in celebrations of the spirit, in conversations about the mission and vision of the university. I have blossomed – professionally and personally — through the humanity, generosity of spirit, and inclusiveness of the Jesuits and their embodiment of the spiritual and educational vision of St. Ignatius.

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