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From the Editor: A Challenge to Re-create

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From the Editor

A Challenge to Re-create

Let us imagine that you are the general of an international army of 17,906 “astutely trained” men, all sworn to obey, bonded by traditions that, with one 40-year interruption, go back 470 years. And, though you have been in command fewer than four years, you sense a danger that your army, in training and direction, might be falling behind in the world’s race to keep pace with rapid economic, political, and cultural change. What would you do? Call your general staff together and start issuing orders to “Shape up and catch up”? And don’t forget to salute.

Actually, in the Society of Jesus, words like “general” and “army” are metaphors more than a style of governance. True, Father John, pastor of a New York City parish, told to teach English in Uganda, would go; but Jesuits today, to an extraordinary degree, operate by consultation, individual face-to-face and group discussion, by the painstaking process of building consensus while listening to the Spirit, and gradually convincing one another that, yes it will hurt, but we must change.

This issue of *Conversations* is our response to the challenges offered by Father General Adolfo Nicolás in his remarks on networking in Jesuit higher education delivered in Mexico City, April 23, 2010. It is no secret that during some periods of our history, Jesuit colleges and universities have been more competitive than collegial, reluctant to share “star” faculty with far-away provinces, and not anxious to “brand” themselves as Jesuit when their identity was already established in a big city. But, in the Nicolás vision, every Jesuit university is connected — not just nominally, but spiritually, electronically, and personally — to all the 150 other Jesuit higher-education apostolates in the world.

The structure of this issue of *Conversations* comes from responses to the three areas he stresses: depth of thought and imagination; universality; and learned ministry. To this we have appended reports from around the world documenting how the reforms he proposes are already underway and a forum in which six brave souls dig their teeth into the challenge to rethink what we are doing now.

As many of the articles document, the changes Fr. Nicolás’s talk calls for have started: technology that can link professors in the United States in college courses for refugees in Africa; pre-college training in the Cristo Rey network; travel which immerses American students in foreign cultures to a degree which transforms the lives of both; a theology of God which incorporates our knowledge of the universe into our concept of who and what He or She may be; ground-breaking meetings of ethicists from all over the world.

Some also ask tough questions: We are all for peace and justice, but do our courses spell out the cost of wars, and do we distribute our Jesuit resources according to where we are already succeeding or according to our greatest need? And have we taught our students how to support financially the system which gave them success?

Above all, as you can see from our contributors, the challenge comes from a Jesuit leader, but its response must come not from the minority of Jesuits who now staff our institutions, but from all the men and women, including students, who are full partners in this holy enterprise.

We specifically invite your responses to publish in the next issue.



Deep Gratitude and New Welcomes

If *Conversations* has done well over the last few years, it has been because of the leadership offered by **Jack O’Callaghan, S.J.**, of the Chicago Province, who brought to his role as chairman of the Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education, the wisdom acquired as a general assistant in Rome, Chicago provincial, and medical ethicist at Loyola University; and **Charley T. Phipps, S.J.**, professor of English at Santa Clara, as secretary. Add to this the influence of **Charles L. Currie, S.J.**, president of AJCU, *Conversations’* sponsor. I have known Charlie Currie and his two Jesuit brothers as friends either since high school at St. Joe’s Prep or my post-ordination years at Georgetown. Jack, Charley and Charlie are three of the finest Jesuits I have ever known.

Meanwhile we look forward to receiving leadership from **Pat Howell, S.J.**, rector of the Seattle University Jesuit community, theology chair, contributor to the *Seattle Times*, as our chairman; and **Stephen Rowntree, S.J.**, philosophy professor at Loyola New Orleans, where our friendship began, and philosophy professor for several years in Zimbabwe, as secretary. In Charlie Currie’s footsteps comes **Gregory F. Lucey, S.J.**, former president of Spring Hill College and now president of AJCU. If the seminar does well and the magazine is good, much of the success comes from the spirit of sharing within the rotating group of the ten Jesuit and lay men and women representing the 28 schools. All the members look forward to working with our new team. ■

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