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From the Editor: Integrating the Mission: Strong Ideals, Brave Words, Real Action

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From the Editor

Integrating the Mission: Strong Ideals, Brave Words, Real Action

Once it was clear. If you had Jesuits and they had a school, it was a Jesuit school. That was Jesuit education. When Georgetown was founded in 1789, it was not a Jesuit school and did not become one officially until Jesuits arrived in 1805. (The Jesuits were mostly suppressed from 1773 to 1814, but a remnant lived on in Russia. The first Jesuits at Georgetown were affiliated with them.) Other schools that bishops had founded also later became Jesuit schools, such as Spring Hill, St. Louis, and Xavier. There was no great theory of Jesuit education. And there was no need to talk of mission integration; it was obvious.

The number of schools grew and grew as bishops wanted to provide for their burgeoning Catholic populations, and immigrant groups included Jesuits who knew from their tradition if not from personal experience how to organize schools. The Jesuit schools were typically six-year colleges, which were common in the United States until the early 20th century, when the four-year high schools and four-year colleges became standard.

As cities expanded into suburbs, Jesuits built new high schools there. Recent decades have seen the foundation of the Cristo Rey schools and Jesuit Nativity and other middle schools, expanding the scope of Jesuit education. And Jesuit parishes have grade schools or preschool, though one does not hear much theory about a distinctive Jesuit parish school. In a word, Jesuit education flourished.

Jesuit education began to change, however, in significant ways. As the number of schools grew and the schools themselves expanded, the concentration of Jesuits in them began to lessen. Trends in church life saw fewer men becoming Jesuits and saw greater demand for those who were available. The schools became far more complex, and the Jesuits who had the needed leadership skills were stretched thin to cover the diverse Jesuit ministries. And dedicated and fully competent teachers and administrators who were not Jesuits began to fill leadership positions at all level. What was Jesuit education now?

I vividly recall conversations at a Jesuit university in the 1970s. There venerable fathers debated what were the essential positions for Jesuits to fill if the school continued to be and to call itself Jesuit. Certainly the president had to be a Jesuit, and certainly major vice presidents, particularly the

academic vice president. Most likely the dean of arts and sciences had to be a Jesuit, and probably the chair of theology too. A Jesuit director of campus ministry was clearly necessary, and a Jesuit in fundraising was really important. And Jesuits had to control the board of trustees. These were serious men, dedicated, concerned. They knew Jesuit education and wanted it to go on.

Jesuit education does go on. In the intervening years, we have come to see that the Jesuit character of education does not belong to the Jesuits alone. It is part of the mission of the school. It belongs to everyone who works there and to every student who goes there to learn. It is embedded in a language rooted in Jesuit tradition, even if that language is fluid and still developing. The integration of the ideals and the words that express the ideals into the mission of the schools is the matter for the stories in this issue of *Conversations*. Mission integration applies to courses, to student life, to hiring, to finances, to unique programs that are the fruit of individuals' creative imagination and energy.

Jesuit education received a big boost with the election of the first Jesuit pope last year. One of our lead articles explores how the leadership style of Pope Francis both supports and challenges Jesuit higher education.

One thing is clear. Jesuit education is as alive as it ever was, lived out in great variety but with a core experience of the values that St. Ignatius Loyola left to his followers. It lives on the many campuses of our 28 AJCU schools as it does too in the Jesuit high schools and even elementary schools. It is properly proud and always eager to find new articulation. And if there is still no one great unified theory of Jesuit education, it is as real as the lives of our faculties and staffs, our students and their families. Mission integration? We are working on it, and working very well.

(A final note: we congratulate our designer and art director, Pauline Heaney, and her husband Thomas; their oldest son Connor begins his Jesuit education this fall at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City. The tradition lives!) ■

Edward W. Schmidt, S.J., editor