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Collaboration or Commandment?: The Distresses of Dialogue on a Jesuit Campus

Jo Ann M. Recker, S.N.D. de N.

Is the dialogue among cultures that is deemed imperative to the Jesuit Mission as articulated in the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation really possible on Jesuit campuses today?

The mission of the Society... must be a dialogue, born of respect for people, especially the poor, in which we share their cultural and spiritual values and offer our own cultural and spiritual treasures, in order to build up a communion of peoples instructed by God's Word and enlivened by the Spirit as at Pentecost. Our service of the Christian faith must never disrupt the best impulses of the culture in which we work, nor can it be an alien imposition from outside. \(\begin{align*} \)

As a point of departure for a discussion of the faculty culture in any Jesuit institution of higher education, it seemed appropriate to consult the document, "Our Mission and Culture," from the most recent General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. The definition of culture it provides forms a helpful focus: "'Culture' means the way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate and share life. In every culture, there are underlying systems of values, meaning, and views of the world, which are expressed, visibly, in language, gestures, rituals, and styles." What emerged in this rereading is the emphasis on the imperative of dialogue as essential to mission. Questions surfaced: Is dialogue really taking place on our campuses? Is dialogue truly possible in a social structure based on a system of father-rule, a social organization that is hierarchical in nature and operation? While I cannot speak about faculty at all Jesuit colleges and universities, perhaps some experiences of faculty at Xavier University will be reflective of and instructive for those at other schools. I know from conversations with friends at a few of these institutions that this is indeed the case.

First, it is important to address the question, "Who is Xavier as a 'group of people' "? What are the faculty's underlying systems of values, view of the world and how are they expressed visibly? According

to a survey of the full-time undergraduate faculty, facilitated by the Higher Education Research Institute-UCLA (HERI Faculty Survey) and completed in 1998, the following statistics pertain:³

TELEVISION AND THE	54.5 male	45.5 female	
professor	35.8	9.1	
associate	34.3	41.8	
assistant	28.4	32.7	
instructor	1.5	5.5	
director			
/coordinator	10.8	12.5	
chair	12.3	7.1	7"
racial/white	90.0	98.2	W
African			
American	4.5		
Asian	1.5	1.8	
Puerto-Rican			
American	1.8		
Other Latino	3.0		
Degree/MA, MS	6.0	23.2	
PhD	83.6	69.6	

We are predominantly white and male, with the males on campus having the greater number in the rank of professor as well as the majority of the higher administrative positions, though these figures have changed slightly in the intervening years.

Addressing the issue of this group's underlying systems of values, meaning and the like is, understandably, more elusive. In general, it can be said that currently and historically, the Xavier faculty is and has been characterized by an ethos of caring: caring for the students and caring for the welfare of one another as colleagues. Attesting to this is the documented reaction of students who visit the campus and verbalize the reason for their final selection; further, it is the response most frequently given when members of the faculty themselves are asked to characterize the culture.

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And what does this "group of people" think and feel today? How do we organize ourselves? "A Report from the Faculty Committee, 1999" that studied the implications of the 1998 survey mentioned above highlights the following: 1) "On the whole, the faculty at Xavier are satisfied with their jobs, particularly in areas such as autonomy and independence, relationship with other faculty..."⁴ 2) "Most of the faculty find Xavier to be a good environment in which to teach and conduct research...." However, and not surprisingly in that it is reflective of concerns shared by those in many institutions of higher education, the faculty also testified to dissatisfaction in the area of compensation and to "considerable concern" with respect to the compensation allotted to adjuncts (another manifestation, perhaps, of this culture of As for the issue of organization and caring). organizational communication, there was "notable dissatisfaction" with respect to faculty input on a university level. Indeed, it was felt that faculty input was ignored on academic issues and that, even after consultation, "it appeared that their views were not considered in final decisions."6 This perception persists despite a recent reorganization of the faculty governance structure and a seeming proliferation of committees that are deemed to have "too little impact."⁷ Faculty evidenced a strong desire for more genuine collaboration and consultation wherein faculty would be involved in "meaningful decision-making processes."8

Faculty women, particularly, expressed a feeling of powerlessness and alienation within the organizational structure. In a separate report completed in September of 1999, "Report of the Committee on the Status of Women at Xavier," the women stated that they experienced strained relations with administration as well as feelings of second-class status "in a number of significant and symbolic ways." Referring again to the HERI Faculty Survey, 30.4% of women, compared to 12.5% of men.

felt that people at Xavier do not respect each other. Furthermore, only 48.2% of women compared to 76.9% of the men felt that women faculty are treated fairly. In both cases these gender gaps are much larger than the gaps found at Catholic four-year colleges and all private four-year colleges.

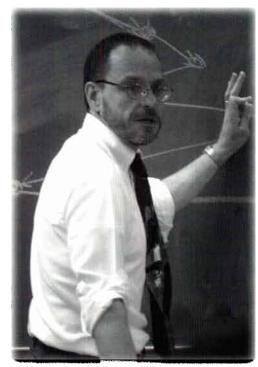


Photo by: Marquette Office of Communications

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Conversations / Fall 2001 40 And, especially unsettling were the findings that

50.9% of women, compared to 17.2% of men, indicated that subtle discrimination had been a source of stress in the past two years, and 16.1% of women, compared to 4.5% of men, said they had been sexually harassed ... Again, the gap between women and men at Xavier was larger than at other Catholic four-year colleges and all private four-year colleges. ¹⁰

If a culture is manifested or expressed visibly in "language, gestures, ritual and style," still pervasive, it would seem, are elements of the language, gestures, ritual, and style of the patriarchy, a hierarchical model that has historically worked well for white males. The women in this Jesuit institution continue to be marginalized by forces that oppose change by referring to tradition or the "Xavier way," and by those who counter innovation by making the assertion, "if it ain't broke don't fix it." Those at the disenfranchised end of the gender gap are left to query, "ain't broke' for whom?" Other aspects of ritual and style would include perceptions that women are more likely to leave Xavier than are men, even after being tenured or promoted; that the time period between promotion from associate to full is longer for women than for men. Then, too, there are classroom-related issues reported in the HERI survey, such as the fact that women faculty spend more time in preparation for teaching and are more likely to employ innovative instructional methods. That these efforts are being adequately recognized and rewarded is seriously questioned. 11

More is being done on many Jesuit campuses to share the cultural and spiritual treasures of the Ignatian vision. At Xavier, such endeavors typically come under the aegis of Ignatian Programs and, particularly, through the newest initiative know as AFMIX or Assuring the Future of Mission and Identity at Xavier. This two-year process for willing administrators, faculty, and staff includes a weekly ninety-minute seminar session by means of which the Jesuit mission and Ignatian spirituality are plumbed through extensive readings, small and large-group discussions, presentations, and experiences of privately-directed retreats. What appears to result is a "culture within a culture," or a kind of "communion of peoples" as referred to in "Our Mission and Culture." Participants

are "enlivened" by a stronger sense of community in what truly becomes a common endeavor impelled by the mission of the institution more clearly understood and more personally appropriated. The following testimonials are typical of most. Many, for example, recognized some measure of spiritual growth along with a deepened understanding of the Jesuit mission.

Through the AFMIX program, I have come to a clearer understanding of the mission of Xavier as a Jesuit institution. It has been a consciousness-raising experience for me to see how Xavier and we as individuals are measuring up to this mission and the questions of justice. It has aided my personal spiritual growth and heightened my awareness of seeing God in all things.

Respondents expressed in a number of ways their appreciation for the sense of community experienced among participating administrators, faculty, and staff.

We talk about living the mission; now that I have experienced AFMIX for two years I feel as if the mission is living in me. The process is a way to investigate and reaffirm the many values of a Jesuit education, both as an educational institution and as a community.

At the conclusion of the process, all were asked to articulate how they could better integrate their new insights into their everyday responsibilities at Xavier. A final testimonial:

The AFMIX experience has been extremely intellectually stimulating. It has challenged me as a person and as a professional. In many ways, it has been a transformational experience. As a direct result of AFMIX, I am more committed to the Jesuit identity of Xavier and to the service of others. It continues as an integral part of my teaching and my everyday contacts with colleagues, students and staff.

Such consciousness-raising has its pitfalls. For example, after a study of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach's address, given at Santa Clara University in October of 2000, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," participants made other comments that reflect a restless (and healthy) discontent: "I'm more confused now about our Jesuit identity; are we living what we preach?" 12

We then return to the issue of the underlying

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values of the institutional culture and to further questioning: Are we really mission-driven? And, if we are, is this reflected in our reward structures? Is our institutional house grounded on a foundation of justice? In other words, does justice -- like charity -- begin "at home," or are we "whited sepulchers" preaching a message of "faith that does justice," a message that at times does not seem to be applicable to the institution's treatment of its own employees?

Though we profess to a culture of caring, there seems to be a significant number of faculty who feel that the model of cura personalis is more indicative of faculty/student and faculty/faculty relationships. In other words, it would seem that there is, as an untenured faculty member recently termed it, a "consideration vacuum." Assumptions are made with respect to faculty involvement in a variety of institutional endeavors and these assumptions descend like "an alien

imposition from the

outside."

Without the collaboration of real dialogue between the institutional culture and the faculty culture, these assumptions more readily come in the guise of dictates or commandments. Expectations regarding faculty presence are simply givens -assumptions and expectations dating back, perhaps, to the era when fathers" devoted themselves completely to maintaining the institution. One such example is that during weekends at the end of the academic year -- that is, in late May and throughout the month of June -- it is assumed that faculty will be present to assist with freshman pre-registration, and yet there is no thought about compensation. Another is that, annually, over two weekends in February, faculty members are expected to assist with scholarship interviews and testing and that they invest a significant amount of time in the process. They themselves may even have to pay for the services of caregivers while absent from their homes.

Such "extra-curricular" involvement is quite simply taken for granted and faculty wonder: Does the institution care? Is the institutional leadership aware of the realities of faculty members' lives? Is any consideration given to the fact that we have families or dependents who rely on our presence, assistance,

Xavier is the new president's undertaking of a series of "Listening Sessions," at the outset of his tenure. 15

Faculty are trusting that the dialogue will prove to be a

and financial support? 13

If we return to the document "Our Mission and Culture," we read, we have insisted on the inseparability of justice, dialogue, evangelization of the culture." 14 As stated above. such evangelization at Xavier would seem to be well in progress in our own experience of the AFMIX initiative. But, evangelization "must be born of respect for people." Such respect is evident in the earnestness exhibited in learning the language, gestures, ritual, and style of the other culture, and when consideration is consequently paid to the others' reality. respect is evident when measures are taken to show that the one culture truly cares about the values, meaning, and worldview of the other culture. Such respect is evident in genuine dialogue and not in assumptions, expectations, and dictates. Currently, a hopeful indication of such a dialogue at

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genuine one.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), p. 53.
- ² *Ibid*, p. 49, note #1.
- 3 A new survey is currently in progress and will, no doubt, reflect some changes in these statistics. In the report on the Strategic Plan 1994-2001, circulated the week of May 21, 2001, the following figures were provided: 85 of the 220 Principal (tenure-track) Faculty are female. Gender by rank is then:

	Female	Male	Total
Assistant Professor	35	40	75
Associate Professor	39	45	84
Professor	11	50	61

- ⁴ "A Report from the Faculty Committee, 1999," (RFC) p. 1.
- 5 RFC, p. 2.
- 6 RFC, p. 3.
- 7 RFC, p. 4.
- 8 RFC, p. 3.
- 9 "Report on the Status of Women," (RSW)p. 5.
- 10 RSW,p. 5.
- 11 RSW, pp. 9-10.
- 12 The preceding quotations are all taken from anonymous evaluations completed at the conclusion of AFMIX 1. The second two-year AFMIX process, or AFMIX II, began in the summer of 2001.
- 13 Another paper could be written on serious and ongoing concerns such as the need for "family-friendly policies," i.e. support for parenting and other family responsibilities.
- 14 Documents of the Thirty-Fourth" General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), p. 52.
- 15 Summaries of theses sessions are posted on the Xavier web site - http://www.xavier.edu/listening.



Photo by: Creighton University

Bernie Sauer is blessed with extraordinary talent for composing music and happily shares his gift with whomever asks. That's why the Gonzaga University 2001 graduate from Littleton, Colo., who won the prestigious Student Choral Composition Award for undergraduate composers from the Pacific Northwest. aims to teach first and compose second - not vice-

Sauer says he had considered a career strictly as a composer but decided that teaching and composing best fit his goals. "I think it's more important to teach," said Sauer, who has provided free piano lessons to virtually all who ask - including students from Logan Elementary School in the GU neighborhood, Rogers High School, and even other music majors required to learn basic plano proficiency. "Right now, I want to share my talents with others. I don't see the point of charging people when it's the gift of music and music can live on forever in someone.

Sauer plans to attend the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley this fall to earn a master's degree in music that would allow him to become certified to teach composition in college and compose on the side. Then, he plans to earn a doctorate in music before deciding whether to teach in high school or college.