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Jesuit Universities Serving the Local Church

By Tom Reynolds

As Jesuit colleges and universities increase their engagement with their surrounding neighborhoods and communities, they have been drawn into deeper relationships with the network of schools, non-profit organizations, neighborhood associations, health care providers, and local governments. In more recent years, the 28 Jesuit, Catholic colleges and universities have embarked on a joint effort to reflect on their Jesuit, Catholic identities through the Institutional Examen process, which includes an examination of the oldest and most central set of relationships with Catholic parishes, dioceses, schools, and other organizations of the local church.

Historical Context

These relationships have long historical roots. Many Jesuit institutions trace their founding to the initiative of local bishops to serve their growing Catholic populations. In fact, bishops were involved with the founding of all the Jesuit universities established before the Civil War. These schools served almost exclusively the needs of the Catholic community. Jesuit schools in the U.S., notably described as streetcar colleges in Jencks and Riesman's *The Academic Revolution* (1968), provided educational opportunities for generations of urban Catholic immigrant students.

Phillip Gleason, in his history of Catholic higher education, *Contending with Modernity* (1995), documented the close connections between Catholic colleges and their sponsoring dioceses for much of their histories, as well as the growing pressures on these schools to modernize their curricula, faculty, and administrative practices using norms common to the rest of American higher education. This gradual movement toward professionalization of Catholic schools was accompanied by an increasing auton-

omy from traditional church institutions, including dioceses and religious orders.

The "Land of Lakes" statement of 1967 essentially clarified this movement, which was less a declaration of independence from the Catholic Church or abandonment of Catholic identity, as charged by some critics, and more a description of the new reality Catholic institutions needed to acknowledge in order to remain relevant in the evolving American educational landscape. The powerful impetus of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, with its emphasis on "a faith that does justice," also encouraged new initiatives to align university service programs with international immersion experiences and local projects with marginalized communities.

The Institutional Examen Process

In 2010, in concert with the 20th anniversary of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) issued *The Jesuit Catholic Mission of U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities*, noting the role of Catholic universities as "important ministries of the Catholic Church." Two years later, the AJCU and the Jesuit Conference (U.S. Jesuit provincials) jointly approved *Some Characteristics of Jesuit Colleges and Universities: A Self-Evaluation Instrument*, intended to provide a framework for reviewing and affirming the Jesuit and Catholic identity of the 28 AJCU member schools. Three universities, Xavier, John Carroll, and the University of San Francisco, became the pilot schools for this self-study/peer review process in spring 2016, with five subsequent schools participating the following year and eight more in 2017-18.

In addition to characteristics that focus on Leadership, Academic Life, Campus Culture, Service,

Integrity, and Jesuit Presence, the Examen process asks institutions to reflect on their Service to the Local Church, (Characteristic 5), with attention to “educational and formational programs and resources that build up the local Church; in union with the local Church, it also provides a locus where people of faith can wrestle with difficult questions facing the Church and the world.”

Engaging and Serving the Local Church

Obviously graduate programs in theology or pastoral ministry, which prepare “the next generation of Catholic intellectual leaders,” are a profound service to the Catholic community.

Jesuit institutions also offer programs in adult faith formation for Catholic laity, addressing a gap in Catholic literacy in the U.S. and providing a forum to address difficult challenges within the church and between the church and the wider culture. Some examples of such initiatives include: The Church in the 21st Century program at Boston College; the Bannan Institute at Santa Clara University; the Curran Center at Fordham University; The Hanks Center at Loyola University Chicago; the Loyola Institute of Ministry at Loyola University New Orleans; and Spring Hill College’s graduate theology programs taught in Mobile and Atlanta and on line.

In addition, other related institutes and centers (for example, the Institute for Christian-Jewish Relations at St. Joseph’s University, the Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture at Seattle University, and the Institute on the Common Good at Regis) offer the opportunity for interreligious dialogue between different faith traditions, another missing piece in the formation of many American Catholics.



Designed by Jeremy Leichman and Joan Benefiel, “Examen” is a two-part sculpture of St. Ignatius at Fairfield University.

Serving the local church can often center on the relationship between the local bishop and the university. The “Challenge” section in Characteristic 5 of “Some Characteristics” notes diplomatically, “There is, at times, mutual misunderstanding between some bishops and some universities on what academic freedom rightly requires of Jesuit, Catholic universities. How successfully has this institution managed to build bridges and foster mutual understanding in this realm?” Such misunderstandings have included disagreements over the rights of faculty members to disagree publicly with church teachings, particularly around “hot-button” issues;

the presence of LGBTQ student organizations on campus; and commencement speakers or performances of plays such as *The Vagina Monologues*.

The relationship depends largely on the personality of individual bishops and individual Jesuit university presidents, and how they work together. More fundamental is how each partner understands the role of a Catholic university, not only as a university, but as a ministry of the Catholic Church distinct from other ministries. Universities are not parishes, serving only Catholics, nor are they seminaries preparing students for the priesthood or catechetical programs giving basic doctrinal instruction.

Instead of focusing on these inherent sources of potential conflict, Jesuit schools participating in the Examen have found productive conversations around partnerships that bring university resources to bear on shared projects with the local church. Among the eight participating schools that have completed their self-study reports and visits, examples have included:

- Tuition support or discounts for clergy and other diocesan employees to further their professional education;
- Support for local Catholic K-12 schools, particularly those serving the urban poor, such as the Cristo Rey network high schools and the Nativity-San Miguel middle schools;
- Financial support for Catholic school teachers and administrators completing licensure requirements and training programs for new teachers modeled after the Notre Dame ACE program;
- Joint programs with local Hispanic Catholic ministry programs;
- Continuing education, opportunities for Catholic health care facilities, Catholic Charities, and other Catholic non-profit groups.

A Way Forward?

By shifting the conversation to how the school can support and build up the Catholic community, instead of dwelling on frustrating disagreements on the proper nature of a Catholic college/university, both groups may come to see themselves as partners rather than rivals. Such collaborative efforts make both more aware of their shared faith commitments.

Jesuit schools have significant resources and expertise that the Catholic community needs. They emerged “from the heart of the Church” in the past 200+ years in the United States, and they have much to offer and much to learn from the lives of “the people of God.”

Tom Reynolds is the provincial assistant for higher education for the Central and Southern Province of the Jesuits. He recently retired as vice president for mission at Regis University.

Resources - The Examen

A collection of websites from some Jesuit sources addressing the issue of the daily Examen, referenced in some of our articles.

This website provides information on how to make the Examen part of your day, variations on the Examen, reflections on praying the Examen, and a handout (found on many AJCU school websites.)

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen>.

This PDF provides a concise explanation of each of the five steps in the Examen.

<https://www.gonzaga.edu/student-life/CCP/inc/Resilience/The%20Examen%20infographic.pdf>.

This document provides different versions of the Daily Examen including an annual Examen and an Examen for Managers and Parents.

<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/news-events/Daily-Examen-Resources.cfm>.

These documents provide examples of simple questions you can ask yourself during each step of the Examen.

<http://president.loyno.edu/chaplain/examen>.

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/AudioRetreat/Kroll-01-2010/Kroll-T11-01.pdf>.

This short reflection on the Examen with a student focus includes 3 videos at the end to help guide individuals through the practice.

<https://www.creighton.edu/creighton-magazine/2015fallnewsexamen/>.

Each document presents questions to the reader, guiding them to the “why” behind incorporating the Examen into their daily life

<http://www.marquette.edu/faith/examen-of-consciousness.php>.

https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/C-%5Cfakepath%5CThe%20Ignatian%20Examen_Scala.pdf.

Includes the My Examen Prayer to be said during the daily Examen

<https://www.gonzaga.edu/about/Mission/LibraryMission.asp>.