

Celebrating 125 years of Jesuit/Lay Partnership in Omaha
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Creighton University

“Cooperating with Each Other in Mission”

Introduction

Thank you, Archbishop Curtiss, for your prayer and for your support of the work of the Society here in the Omaha Archdiocese. Thank you, Fr. Grummer. I am really delighted to be a part of these two important celebrations. I am grateful for your help to recognize the history of Jesuit and lay partnership in ministry, from the very beginning of the arrival of Jesuits in Omaha until the present. This is very important as we discuss the opportunities and challenges of cooperating with each other in mission in the future.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* while he was still a lay person. It is a guidebook for someone directing another person in a pilgrimage, seeking God’s grace of spiritual freedom for the complete gift of oneself in service to others, in companionship with Jesus, the one whose mission from the Lord we share.

Let me begin by recognizing who we are, gathered here tonight at Creighton, in the Heartland of America. The variety of persons, backgrounds and gifts that you represent is indeed impressive.

Among the Jesuits are Jesuit novices in the beginning of formation; senior Jesuits, whose mission now is to pray for the ministries of the Society; and Jesuits who have labored and still labor in many ministries. These men are proud of their Ignatian heritage, always humbly aware that they are sinners, yet called to be Companions of Jesus, as Ignatius was.¹ While our diminished numbers can discourage us at times, we embrace the new vitality that has come to our ministries with the gifts of our lay partners. The Jesuits here are committed to improve apostolic community life, and are renewed in their dedication to place themselves at the service of many of you, their partners, with whom they cooperate in mission, “by offering, what we are and have received: our spiritual and apostolic inheritance, our educational resources, and our friendship.”²

Among the lay people, our partners in ministry, there is a rich variety of lay women and men called to holiness precisely as lay people,³ called to be the leaven⁴ of God’s salvation in the world. They are members of the boards of Jesuit institutions and members of the Parish Councils of Jesuit parishes; people who serve in Jesuit sponsored parishes, retreat centers, missions, schools and on the Province staff; but also benefactors, alumni, parents, middle school, high school, undergraduate and professional students, parishioners, and spiritual directors. You represent a variety of cultural backgrounds. You are members of the Christian Life Community and the Ignatian Associates. Many have made the *Spiritual Exercises* in some form, and a number give them to others. You come from a number of religious orders and a variety of religious traditions, or no particular religious tradition, but share a common vision of service for and with others.

All of us gathered here this evening are people joined to our Lord and we represent a unity in the midst of a marvelous religious, ethnic, cultural and tribal diversity.

I am also pleased to recognize that among you are clergy of this archdiocese and friends from the city of Omaha and the surrounding area. And, as a sign of our global reality in this age of technology, we are joined by Jesuits, partners and friends from around the world, via the internet.

History

As this very special group gathers to reflect on how we will cooperate in mission in the future, we look back into the past which prepared us for this night.

The history of the Jesuit-Lay partnership has been a history of a tightly bound network of mutual support. In the years after Ignatius wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, after he gathered his earliest companions around him, after they were ordained priests, and even after they founded the Society of Jesus, Ignatius never lost contact with the world of the laity.

From the beginning, his friends, both women and men, housed him, cared for him when he was sick, and supported his undertakings. In return, Ignatius shared his friendship and the great gift of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which he urged them to share with others.

When he established his first ministry in Rome, the House of St. Martha, he also established the “Company of Grace”⁵ – a confraternity of lay people who became involved in this ministry with prostitutes and were its earliest supporters. In the days of Ignatius, confraternities were a popular means of involving lay men and women in church ministries, and he enthusiastically embraced them as partners in the works of the Society. He established other confraternities as he began other ministries, establishing a historical pattern for the way Jesuits proceed in ministry.

The pattern of request for help and lay partnership was repeated here in Omaha. Mary Lucretia Creighton desired to establish a Catholic college in Omaha, and Bishop James O’Connor, the second Bishop of Omaha, invited the Jesuits to come for this purpose. Eight months later, in 1877, Jesuit Father Roman Shaffel arrived in Omaha to serve as president. When Creighton opened in the fall of 1878, the first staff consisted of one other Jesuit priest, two Jesuits in formation, one layman, and one laywoman.⁶

Over a century later the Jesuit Middle School of Omaha followed the same pattern as an answer to the vision and the request of parents and friends in the north side community. It thrives today as the latest institutional example of Jesuit-lay partnership in Omaha.

But in the years since the Society of Jesus was founded, even in the years since the Wisconsin Province was founded, we Jesuits have changed the way we view these partners in ministry. In the books of St. Ignatius you can read that all who work in our Jesuit high schools should be Jesuits. However, there was always one function reserved for a lay person. That was the “corrector.” That means that the Jesuits should never beat a student. They was given over and entrusted to the laity. At one time, we considered all of these talented lay partners as being here

to help us with the activities to which we Jesuits were called by God. And we have to admit that a full assimilation of the meaning and true spirit of mutually respectful collaboration has come slowly for us. Indeed for many years we looked upon “lay collaboration” as a necessary salvage-operation in the face of our own declining numbers. I believe, however, that the years have taught us a deeper appreciation for the richness of mutual gifts that all bring to the ministries we share.

The Second Vatican Council invited all of us into a new vision of partnership by recognizing that “The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one – that sanctity is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God...”⁷ Jesuits are not the only ones with a call to holiness or a vocation. Many of the lay partners in Jesuit institutions are responding to the call of the gospel summoning the hearts of all the baptized. Jesuits and laity are called to answer in different ways, but it is clearly a call we share. The American bishops affirmed the universal call to holiness in 1995 by writing, “The laity's call to holiness is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Their answer is a gift to the Church and to the world.”⁸

The Council’s call is as vital today as it was forty years ago: Every person must walk according to his or her own “personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity.”⁹

As is quite commonly the case in Jesuit works in Asia, some of our treasured colleagues and friends follow other faith traditions. Let me thank those of you from other traditions here tonight for the perspectives and learning you have offered and continue to offer, for your contribution to our common mission.

“Cooperating with the Laity in Mission” – GC 34 – Decree 13

Almost 10 years ago, the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus addressed all the Jesuits of the world on the topic of “Partnership with the Laity in Mission.” Decree Thirteen of that Congregation begins with these words: “A reading of the signs of the times since the Second Vatican Council shows unmistakably that the Church of the next millennium will be called, as John Paul II said, the ‘Church of the Laity.’”¹⁰ The Congregation said that the Society of Jesus acknowledges that this development is “a grace of our day and a hope for the future”¹¹ and therefore we seek “to respond to this grace by offering ourselves in service to the full realization of this mission of the laity, and we commit ourselves to that end by cooperating with them in their mission.”¹²

This was an important moment for the Society of Jesus. Looking back over the years, we recognized that we had indeed fostered cooperation with the laity in our own apostolic works. While admitting that our first rather reluctant steps in this direction resulted from our own declining number, we have come to see that this growing partnership with the laity “has expanded our mission and transformed the ways in which we carry it out in partnership with others. It has enriched what we do and how we understand our role in that mission.”¹³ We foresaw “the expansion of lay apostolic leadership in Jesuit works in years to come and pledge[d] ourselves to assist this development.”¹⁴

This was an important moment indeed for the Society because there are more lay persons in our ministries and this has been a real blessing. Although we had been accustomed to describing ourselves, with our apostolic focus, as “men *for* others;” we articulated the realization that we are also “men *with* others,” like the Lord did.

This basic characteristic of our way of proceeding calls for an attitude and readiness to cooperate, to listen and to learn from others, to share our spiritual and apostolic inheritance. To be "men with others" is a central aspect of our charism and deepens our identity.¹⁵

In addition to being ready to serve wherever called, we recognize that we need to have the attitude, the readiness, to cooperate, to listen and to learn from others. It is in this way only that we will share our spiritual and apostolic tradition. We Jesuits need to be not only friends and companions of the Lord and each other, we must be friends and companions of our partners in mission. This reciprocity of personal presence is central to our identity as Jesuits. It is the key to cooperating with each other in mission which is required for the future. Partnership with others in ministry “is an essential dimension of the contemporary Jesuit way of proceeding, rooted in the realization that to prepare our complex and divided world for the coming of the Kingdom requires a plurality of gifts, a plurality of perspectives, a plurality of experiences, both international and multicultural.”¹⁶

Service to the Laity in Their Ministry

Moving beyond simply inviting lay persons to join Jesuits in Jesuit sponsored works requires a different perspective for both Jesuits and lay partners in mission. For there to be a partnership of equality, the question changes from “How can lay women and men assist Jesuits in their ministries?” A new question emerges: “How can Jesuits serve lay women and men in their ministries?” For that to happen, Jesuits must think of our parish, our retreat center, our school in a completely new way.¹⁷ In linguistics we know that “our,” “us,” can be exclusive – we only – and can be inclusive – we all. We have to pass from an exclusive use of our parish, our school to an inclusive use. It is “ours” now, referring to a larger group, because it is a mission for which all of us – Jesuit and lay – are co-responsible.

As our Jesuit contribution to this common enterprise we have pledged to offer “what we are and what we have received: our spiritual and apostolic inheritance, our educational resources, and our friendship.”¹⁸ It is important to recognize that we *offer* these gifts, we invite others, but we do not impose. One of the important gifts that our partners bring to our joint ministry is their very freedom, a freedom that we Jesuits must not only accept but must respect and appreciate.

The spiritual inheritance that we Jesuits offer, our Ignatian Spirituality, is an apt apostolic tool. It is an active spirituality. After making the *Spiritual Exercises*, a person is prepared to serve with greater freedom, to discern the “greater good” among a variety of goods, and to find an intimacy with God in the midst of his or her everyday life of service.

We Jesuits owe it to our partners to remain rooted in the graces of the *Spiritual Exercises* and to find ways to make this apostolic resource available to those with whom we cooperate in mission.

In addition after so many centuries, Jesuits have some wisdom and experience to share from our heritage to offer as resources in support of our partners. And especially, we have our friendship to share. Friends know each other, respect and trust each other, and share the graces and challenges of each other's lives. One of the greatest gifts Jesuits have to offer in support of our colleagues is our companionship: "serving together, learning from and responding to each other's concerns and initiatives, dialoguing with one another on apostolic objectives."¹⁹

The Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society

Speaking about laity, I should like to mention in a special way the situation of women in Church and civil society. In its recent document on the "... Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," the Holy See has underscored the mutuality and complementarity of the gifts that men and women have to offer, each from their own respective genders, for the good of humanity and of the Church. We have been considering such mutuality and complementarity from the perspective of our shared ministry as lay people and Jesuits in our works. It is also important to appreciate the dimension of mutuality and complementarity that comes more specifically from the distinct gifts that women and men bring, and attend particularly to the often overlooked gifts of women.

In its concluding section, the letter of the Holy See notes that for men:

The witness of women's lives must be received with respect and appreciation, as revealing those values without which humanity would be closed in self-sufficiency, dreams of power and the drama of violence. Women too, for their part, need to ... recognize the unique values and great capacity for loving others which their femininity bears. In both cases, it is a question of humanity's conversion to God, so that both men and women may come to know God as their "helper", as the Creator full of tenderness, as the Redeemer who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn 3:16).²⁰

Jesuits know that the nurturing of our own faith and much of our own ministry would be greatly diminished without the dedication, generosity, and joy that women bring to the schools, parishes, and other fields in which we labor together. ... We wish to express our appreciation for this generous contribution of women, and hope that this mutuality in ministry might continue and flourish.²¹

In response to the discrimination, inequity, and violence that women suffer, the Congregation called upon Jesuits to join "all men and women of goodwill, especially Catholics, to make the essential equality of women a lived reality."²² It committed the Society "in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission."²³

To cooperate with each other in mission, we must work together – Jesuits, lay men and lay women, priests, and religious – to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women

and men. “Listening, in a spirit of partnership and equality, is the most practical response we can make and is the foundation for our mutual partnership to reform unjust structures.”²⁴

This style of partnership in mission aligns us in solidarity with women in concrete ways. Acknowledging the great progress that has been made in many areas, we must continue to work toward a more consistent and universal equality and justice for women and all members of civil society.

Formation of Laity and Jesuits

All this is asking for formation: formation of laity and formation of Jesuits to cope with this new dimension of our work. To grow in cooperation in mission together will require formation for both lay persons and Jesuits. We Jesuits should ensure, for those partners who freely choose to take up such an invitation, that “laity who collaborate in Jesuit apostolates can expect from us a specific formation in Ignatian values, help in discernment of apostolic priorities and objectives, and practical strategies for their realization.”²⁵ Such formation, again always freely offered and freely chosen, needs to be carefully planned and coordinated. Those who have accepted roles of leadership, management, supervision and direction of various areas of Jesuit sponsored ministries, whether a whole program or school, or a department or office, have a legitimate expectation to be prepared to take up such responsibilities. It is our Jesuit responsibility to make available to them the possibility of exploring more deeply the roots of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit ways of proceeding, to help them carry out their responsibilities towards the Catholic and Jesuit identity of the works they serve. They will use their unique personal and professional gifts, enhanced with a clear vision of the transcendent values of the Jesuit mission and the skills for Ignatian discernment. To “exercise co-responsibility and be engaged in discernment and participative decision making”²⁶ requires careful and systematic preparation.

Members of boards of trustees and parish councils have a special role in the vision and governance of our Jesuit sponsored ministries. They should see to it that each of their members has the opportunity for sufficient formation in Ignatian values and the skills necessary for the special responsibility they bear. All who cooperate with Jesuits in any mission should grow in comfort with turning to Society leadership, Jesuit communities, and individual Jesuits for support in their work. People who come to be served by these ministries will thereby continue to trust that they are the fruit of “Jesuit” and lay cooperation in mission, in a meaningful and identifiable way.

For our part, we Jesuits need both initial and ongoing formation to gain experience and skills for cooperating with the laity in mission. As together we pray for vocations to the Society, let us pray especially that the Lord prepare and call to this service young men who are part of the “Church of the Laity.” Men entering the Society should receive formation in appreciating this “grace of our day,” becoming rooted and grounded in this way of proceeding for Jesuits today. They should have specific opportunities to learn from the experience of women and any disadvantaged members of society. They should be mentored in how to align themselves in solidarity with women and the poor. They should be supervised in apostolic experiences necessary for developing “a capacity for collaborating with both laity and fellow Jesuits.”²⁷ The

future of this Jesuit Lay partnership will depend, in great measure, upon the next generation of Jesuits.

Ongoing formation of all Jesuits, in the midst of active ministry with lay partners, should develop and deepen our capacity to “listen to others, learn from their spirituality, and face together the difficulties of genuine cooperation.”²⁸ We can expect that there will continue to be a flourishing of specialized lay ministries responding to new needs, with special lay gifts. With our Ignatian heritage and our ministerial experience, we Jesuits can support these new ministries.

“[W]e must increasingly shift the focus of our attention from the exercise of our own direct ministry to the strengthening of laity in their mission. To do so will require of us an ability to draw out their gifts and to animate and inspire them. Our willingness to accept this challenge will depend on the strength of our Jesuit companionship and on a renewal of our response to the call of Christ to serve his mission.”²⁹

Forgoing the fulfillment that comes from direct personal ministry in order to encourage and strengthen the ministry of others is understandably difficult for some Jesuits whose hearts are on fire with zeal for the Lord’s people. They want to put their gifts and talents to use in direct service of their brothers and sisters. They may even feel that serving the ministry of others somehow diminishes or reduces their exercise of priesthood to a function. However, those who listen carefully to the bishop during the rite of ordination know that in the prayer of this ceremony that this way of being is a wholehearted response to the sacrament of priesthood itself. For each is instructed to “imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross...”³⁰ Those called to priesthood know they follow closely in the footsteps of the One who “came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28).” Even an examination of the ministry of Jesuits who excel in collaborative partnership with their colleagues demonstrates the abundant generosity of the Lord who blesses our offering by making them bear much fruit, for ultimately all we accomplish is God’s gift to us.

We Jesuits thank you, our colleagues in mission, for your patience and care for us, especially in the transformation of our ministries during the past forty years. Please continue to help us grow with you in this evolving partnership in mission. We are grateful for your appropriation of the charisms of the Ignatian heritage. As Ignatius said himself, it is only one among many ways but it is a way to the Lord. And we thank you for the tremendous talents and skills you bring to our work together, and for your exemplary service to Ignatian ministry. We owe our deepest gratitude and pledge of support.

Conclusion

Tonight we have recalled the blessing of Jesuit lay partnership in mission for the past 125 years here in Omaha, reflecting upon its origins in Ignatius himself. We have acknowledged how this blessing has become a grace of our day. We have recognized the need for ongoing formation in our Ignatian charisms and our capacity for listening to and learning from each other to face the challenges of our call and the cry of the poor around us. And we have imagined how the Jesuit mission is enhanced and extended by celebrating every form of partnering in being women and men, for and with others.

At the conclusion of the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius invites us to look back at God's generous love for us. Love expresses itself in deeds. In true love, the gift of self for the other becomes mutual. Tonight, as we recall the blessings we have received, let us pray in gratitude and renewed commitment to the Divine Majesty:

Creator and Lord,
we give you thanks and praise for the grace of our day –
for a flourishing of gifts among us,
for gifts given that your Kingdom might come and your will be done.

Take and receive these gifts you have given us, O Lord,
and place us with your Son, in service together,
uniting us, that we might bring union and peace to our world.

Give us only your love and your grace,
and we will be freed enough,
free to give all that we have and are
for your greater glory and the service of others,
in the name of Christ the Lord.

Amen.

¹ GC 32, D. 2, n. 1, “Jesuits Today.”

² GC 34, D. 13, n. 7, “Cooperating with the Laity in Mission.”

³ *Lumen Gentium*, 11 “Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.”

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 31 “But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.”

⁵ John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. *Ignatius of Loyola: Founder of the Jesuits* (The Library of World Biography – Pearson Education, Inc.) 2004, p. 123.

⁶ M.P. Dowling, S.J., *Creighton University: Reminiscences of the First 25 Years* (Omaha, Buckley Printing Co) 1903, p. 57.

⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, n 41.

⁸ *Called and Gifted for the Third Millenium*, Reflections of the U.S. Catholic Bishops on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* and the Fifteenth Anniversary of *Called and Gifted*, (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1995).

⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 41.

¹⁰ GC 34, D. 13, n. 1.

¹¹ GC 34, D. 13, n. 1.

¹² GC 34, D. 13, n. 1, referencing: GC 31, D 33, n. 34; Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Address to the Congregation of Provincials 1 “*De Statu Societatis*,” n. 16, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* [ARSI] 20 (1990): p.451; Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “To Friends and Colleagues of the Society of Jesus,” ARSI 20 (1990): pp. 601-7.

¹³ GC 34, D. 13, n. 2.

¹⁴ GC 34, D. 13, n. 2.

¹⁵ GC 34, D. 13, n. 4.

¹⁶ GC 34, D. 26, n. 16.

¹⁷ GC 34, D. 13, n. 20.

¹⁸ GC 34, D. 13, n. 7.

¹⁹ GC 34, D. 13, n.7.

²⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World,” § 17.

²¹ GC 34, D. 14, n. 10.

²² GC 34, D. 14, n. 5.

²³ GC 34, D. 14, n. 16.

²⁴ GC 34, D. 14, n. 12.

²⁵ GC 34, D. 13, n. 8.

²⁶ GC 34, D. 13, n. 13.

²⁷ GC 34, D. 13, n. 9.

²⁸ GC 34, D. 13, n. 9.

²⁹ GC 34, D. 13, n. 19.

³⁰ *The Roman Pontifical*, ICEL, 1978, p. 215.