

Lay-Jesuit Collaboration in Higher Education

Afterword

by Charles L. Currie, S.J.

Charles L. Currie, S.J., Ph.D., is president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. He previously served as rector of the St. Joseph's University Jesuit Community, member of the chemistry department at Georgetown University, president of Wheeling College and Xavier University, and director of Georgetown University's bicentennial celebration. In 1995, he received a Templeton Foundation Award for his course in "Theology and Science." Father Currie's areas of interest include the thought of Teilhard de Chardin and of Pierre Duhem, theology, science, and public policy.

It was a very special evening for Jesuit higher education when Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Father Howard Gray, S.J., and President John DeGioia gathered at Georgetown University to discuss lay-Jesuit collaboration.

Led by Dolores Leckey, who has written extensively on Catholic lay leadership, we had the opportunity to hear: a cardinal, obviously at home on a university campus, offer his warm support and strong challenges; a Jesuit expert on Ignatian spirituality probe the deeper significance of Jesuits partnering with their lay colleagues; and the new lay president of Georgetown amply demonstrate that he was ready to accept the challenge of fostering the distinctive mission of the nation's oldest Jesuit and Catholic university.

We were able to experience in word and action the Church and university relating effectively and affectively to one another, the rich tradition of Jesuit/Ignatian spirituality come alive, and the flesh and blood of lay-Jesuit partnership.

Perhaps we should not really be surprised when all these good things come together as they did that evening. The story of the past 35 years of Jesuit higher education in the United States is a story of significant and effective partnerships with our lay colleagues - trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, and friends. With lay leaders often pointing the way, our 28 schools have not only made extraordinary progress academically, professionally, and financially, but many of us would argue that they are also more intentionally Jesuit and Ignatian than ever.

Fortunately, these schools have had other bishops like Cardinal McCarrick, who describes himself as "a member of the family and a friend," and who models with such distinction the ideal relationship between Church and university. And, fortunately, Jesuit colleges and universities have enjoyed strong lay leadership. Dr. DeGioia is not the first president not to be a Jesuit. Sister Maureen Fay, O.P., has been the University of Detroit Mercy's distinguished president for more than ten years, and a number of lay women and men have served as acting presidents for a year or more.

Still, as Father Connor points out in his Foreword, Dr. DeGioia's appointment at Georgetown led to many questions about its significance for Jesuit higher education. The

appointment of a lay president does not mean there will be no more Jesuit presidents. While there are obviously fewer Jesuit candidates, those candidates do and will exist. Dr. DeGioia's selection simply means that a lay president is now very much an option, depending on the particular school and the candidates available at a particular time. As Fr. Gray observed,

"...we're not bringing lay people in. They were in from the beginning. What we are doing is recognizing in a far more profound way that they have a leadership role."

What I heard that night in Georgetown's Gaston Hall was the powerful synthesis of a bishop's understanding, friendship and support, a Jesuit effectively and inspirationally sharing Ignatian spirituality, and a very special lay colleague rising to the challenge in superb fashion. If something close to that triad can be repeated on each of our campuses, and not just with presidents, we have a very promising future indeed.

Dr. DeGioia well understands the heritage and tradition he is now charged with fostering and keeping alive. We heard evidence of that in his inaugural address, and again in his remarks above. He is blessed with Cardinal McCarrick's friendship and support, and with the Ignatian spirituality that comes alive in someone like Howard Gray.

The four challenges he sees for Georgetown and for himself are the challenges, with appropriate individual nuances, facing each of our 28 schools: relating the Gospel to culture and culture to the Gospel (or the Church to the world and the world to the Church); keeping creative the tension between diversity and identity; engaging in inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue; and educating for justice.

This is a heady agenda for Georgetown, and indeed for each Jesuit college or university. It is more and more obvious that to engage those issues successfully we need all the gifts and experiences, all the imagination and ingenuity, all the honest questions and answers that both Jesuits and their colleagues can provide.

Fortunately, the words we have read in this collection are matched by the actions, past and present, of our presenters. Words and actions like these bode well for the future of Jesuit higher education.