



**Jesuit Education: Embracing the New Frontiers,  
A Continuous Pilgrimage**

**Boston, MA**  
*July 30, 2012*

*Jose Mesa SJ*  
*Secretary for Secondary Education*  
*Society of Jesus - Rome*

Welcome everybody! We are glad we are here for the first time in Jesuit history, sharing our ideas, hopes, challenges and responsibilities. Thanks to BC High for providing us with this unique opportunity to come together and look for creative ways to respond to our mission today and to face, with hope and faith, our own challenges and conquer our own frontiers. We believe that it is really God who has invited us here and thus we have to rise to the occasion. We have received the responsibility to carry on our mission today through institutions old and new which have been the result of great effort, generous faith and hard work of generations of Jesuits and Lay people who, as Saint Ignatius himself, have seen the enormous apostolic potential of secondary education. The Society of Jesus is aware that this potential is still alive and that secondary education continues to be a central apostolic work in our present historical moment.

Our schools are part of a living tradition that challenges us not to be too comfortable with our current accomplishments. We must leave the “comfort zone” of our present moment that can paralyze us and makes us blind to the new frontiers; we need always to discern what God is asking from us and how God wants us to respond to the ever changing historical context. In some ways, our Jesuit tradition impels us to move and change, of course not for the sake of change but always as the result of a spiritual discernment that *seeks and finds God in all things*. When we change, we change because God, always immersed in our human history through His son Jesus, asks us to respond creatively to His love and His concern for creation. So during

this Colloquium we need to keep our hearts open to what He wants to say to us. We have come to share our concerns but more significantly to give our whole being to God's voice.

The Colloquium has two main goals that we need keep in mind:

1. To meet as a global network to respond together to the challenges that the last General Congregation and Fr. General have asked us to face, especially the challenge to become a more effective global apostolic network. National boundaries must no longer define our ways of working together.
2. To reflect together on the Jesuit Mission and Identity today so that through a common understanding we can be more effective and more creative in recognizing and responding to our apostolic frontiers.

The Society really hopes that this meeting can be the beginning of a generous and effective response that can develop all the potential that our schools can offer to our mission today. Let me say that the past General Congregation and Fr. General himself are convinced that this potential cannot be actually advanced without important changes in the way our schools work today.

Many of our schools are very strong, they are schools recognized locally and nationally for providing strong academics combined with a sound education of the whole person, usually accompanied by excellent athletic programs, challenging education in the arts while stressing our vision of *men and women for others* rooted in social justice and critical thinking. I am deeply impressed by the fact that everywhere I go I always hear our students and faculty highlighting the fact that they feel very much at home in our schools; that they find themselves respected and cared for. *Cura personalis* is still one characteristic that most find central to our education. Recently, visiting a Jesuit school, a non-Catholic student told me that he could not think of a better place for him, that the school has helped him to be more active in his own Church and more aware of his own faith; he felt respected and recognized and he was also grateful for the high academic standards of the school and the many programs and

opportunities provided to students. I have heard similar stories everywhere I go. This is without doubt, an environment we want to keep, to strengthen and to cultivate.

However, there is a great temptation in being so good: we feel so comfortable in our own small world and its accomplishments that we can miss the opportunity to change, to move on, to learn, to grow. Some 50 years ago Fr. Arrupe clearly saw this happening in many Jesuit schools at that time, a time when many of those schools were in great shape and were very successful by secular standards. In 1980 in his famous discourse *Our Schools Today and Tomorrow*, Fr. Arrupe argued:

*I caution... about the danger of inertia. It is absolutely essential that [we] become more aware of the changes that have taken place in the Church and in the Society, and aware also of [our] need to keep pace with these changes... That Jesuit community which believes that its school has no need to change has set the stage for the slow death of that school; it will only take about one generation. However painful it may be, we need to trim the tree in order to restore it to strength. Permanent formation, adaptation of structures in order-to meet new conditions, these are indispensable. (No. 28)*

Thus Fr. Arrupe invited us to shake our own walls, look outside and open our spirits to change and development, *to keep pace with the changes*. Our schools responded with generosity to this invitation and we have changed, we are different from what we were 50 years ago; and I am not afraid of saying that we are certainly better, more attuned to our mission, more sensitive to social justice than we were before, we are aware that the world is different and that we have to find new answers to new questions; but it is still true that it is always easy to fall into a default mode in where we just repeat what we have successfully been done in the past, even if this past is the last 10 or 20 years, without worrying too much if this is the best thing to do in the new context, we do change but *are we keeping pace with the changes that demand a deep understanding of the Ignatian Charism and the new context if we are to meet these new challenges?* In some ways the temptation is that we are so good that we prefer not to take the risk of changing, exploring, pioneering new programs and learn from others. We are also part of the paradox of the school as a social institution; that is, the school is a social institution created to facilitate learning but, as we all know, it is an institution that has a hard

time learning itself... This is sometimes our professional and institutional sin: we resist learning...

In 1986 Fr. Kolvenbach also alerted the schools about the same problem:

*The Lord is asking of us the courage to follow the path of renewal. All of us are aware of the rapid evolution going on in the world, in society and in the culture. Education, the school, is profoundly immersed in this evolution and this means that we must be engaged in a continuous adaptation. To consider ourselves outside of history is equivalent to declaring ourselves dead (...) The courage to be innovative implies that we can neither remain fixed in praising the achievements of the past nor endorse change for the sake of change. Every change must be the result of careful research, accepting the risk which change always implies. (Education S.I. n. 59, p13)*

We have been invited to a continuous adaptation to keep pace with the rapid evolution of our world, whose pace of change is unmatched by anything ever experienced in human history. This colloquium can be an opportunity to do our part to adapt to our present context. In the words of Cardinal Newman: **“To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”**

Let us contemplate our new context and what the Society’s thinks God is telling us about our mission today.

General Congregation 35 points out the new context “marked by profound changes, acute conflicts, and new possibilities.” (D. 3, # 8) The Congregation immediately states that we live in a global world of growing interdependence and this process “has continued at a rapid pace; as a result, our interconnectedness has increased. Its impact has been felt deeply in all areas of our life, and it is sustained by interrelated cultural, social, and political structures that affect the core of our mission of faith, justice, and all aspects of our dialogue with religion and culture.” (#9)

Decisions that were made before at the local or national level are now made at a global level affecting all people, especially with reference to the environment, economics and human rights. We are now aware of this global dimension of our lives that was not this clear before

and we open our local and national borders to the new reality. Of course, the Congregation is well aware that

*In this world of instant communication and digital technology, of worldwide markets, and of a universal aspiration for peace and well-being, we are faced with growing tensions and paradoxes: we live in a culture that shows partiality to autonomy and the present, and yet we have a world so much in need of building a future in solidarity; we have better ways of communication but often experience isolation and exclusion; some have greatly benefited, while others have been marginalized and excluded; our world is increasingly transnational, and yet it needs to affirm and protect local and particular identities... (#11)*

We live in our own world of shadows and hopes and we believe, as Saint Ignatius and the first Jesuits, that education through schools can make a difference to diminish the shadows and increase the hopes. In this task we need to keep in mind Fr. Nicolas' analysis concerning the "globalization of superficiality" as a negative effect of globalization. The *cut-and-paste culture* that the new technologies bring can prevent for the serious and careful analysis that the present context requires. In Mexico Fr. Nicolas challenged Jesuit higher education "to promote in creative ways the depth of thought and imagination that are distinguishing marks of the Ignatian tradition... to bring our students beyond excellence of professional training to become well-educated 'whole person[s] of solidarity'. (Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today, p. 3)

The challenge of educating for depth of thought and imagination is also a challenge for our secondary schools. We all know very well that our students, to different levels, participate in the global culture with common artists, common songs, and common problems. As a secretary for education I have had the chance to visit many places and I am always impressed that many of the songs and artists I here on the streets of Latin America, Europe, Africa, the US or the Middle East are the same everywhere... Globalization is not an idea, it is a fact and as educators of the youth that participates in this new reality we need to address it.

GC 35 affirms that

*In this global world marked by such profound changes, we now want to deepen our understanding of the call to serve faith, promote justice, and dialogue with culture and*

*other religions in the light of the apostolic mandate to establish right relationships with God, with one another, and with creation. (# 12)*

The mission is clear: service of faith, promotion of justice as integral aspect of our faith, dialogue with culture, other religions and care for the environment. All of this in the new global context; all of this conceived as one mission of reconciliation, as a mission of building bridges across all divisions; all of this using our depth of thought and imagination to understand God's initiative in our commitment to renew our schools, to up-date our curricula and especially renew ourselves as educators that trust God's grace and love in the midst of some much change, uncertainty and choices. Our response to those challenges is an act of faith itself: that God is working in the changes themselves and that He will guide us to find the path even in the dark night of our problems. But we not only see problems in our present context. As the General Congregation argues it "has become a new apostolic challenge and opportunity for us." Our act of faith is in the Jesuit tradition of world affirming in which we find God working and giving us hope. Thus, we are aware of the dangers and shadows of globalization but we are also aware of the opportunities for solidarity and fraternity that it brings to our divided world. We have to strive -and in our case educate- **for a globalization of solidarity, cooperation and reconciliation**. This new scenario is a way to update the humanist tradition that the first Jesuits so enthusiastically embraced for their schools and that became the distinctive hallmark of Jesuit education for several centuries; a tradition that Pedro de Ribadeneira expressed with his famous saying: "All the well-being of Christianity and of the whole world depends on the proper education of youth." We could argue that this is an overstatement of the power of education; maybe we feel more humble about what we can accomplish, but certainly we should strive to make a difference in the world through our education. As the GC 35 states: we are called "to bridge the divisions of a fragmented world only if we are united by the love of Christ our Lord." (#17)

One of the possibilities that globalization specifically opens for our schools is **networking**. This concept can sound just as a trendy word that everybody feels they need to use today; not doubt this is a real risk; however, for our schools this is really an amazing opportunity to respond creatively to the new context. A few weeks ago, in this same campus, a few Jesuits and lay people gathered for a **Conference on International Networking in the Society of**

***Jesús - Challenges from a Universal Mission.*** They were aware of “the importance of networking in order to increase the apostolic impact at the regional and global level.” (Final Document, p. 2) Of course, they also recognized a “feeling of dejection for not facing the changes that the mission requires from us, and of continuing to do the same tasks in the same old fashioned way; and a feeling of dismay regarding the slow institutional pace with which the structures of the Society of Jesus move in that direction.” (Final Document, p.2) However, the overall assessment is that we are in a *Kairos* moment that demands imagination, generosity and a new ways of doing things.

Of course, one could argue that networking has always been part of our history from the beginning. Ignatius urged Jesuits all over the world to have a constant correspondence with the General Curia as a way to create a sense of a universal body. Even the *Ratio Studiorum* could be seen as establishing a common curriculum and criteria to establish the first really international network of schools in the world.

Thus, what is it that we are called to do today that we did not do before? I think that the Ratio did not really established a network in the way we understand it today but rather it started a model reproduced many times in different places in the world. Today we do not look for this type of organization; we want to keep the tension between being locally rooted, open to international cooperation and to build a global citizenship that can work in solidarity.

The final document of the Conference on networking states:

*Today **Jesuit networking could be defined** as a way of proceeding apostolically through networks that better enable global and regional cooperation at the service of the universal mission, raising the apostolic structures to a new level of agency with global (or regional) impact, and therefore connecting persons and institutions to act as a global and interdisciplinary body, in collaboration with others. (p. 5)*

Mission and identity are the two components that inspire and center our networks; at the same time; however, networking strengthens mission and identity. The document establishes some helpful characteristics of Jesuit networks:

*(a) Mission and identity are the axis of belonging, the strands that nurture connections among members; (b) Despite their horizontality, adequate leadership is crucial and a clear link with the Jesuit government is essential; (c) The networks have specific and clear purposes that require common planning, sustainability and evaluation; (d) They employ as much as a possible a multi-tracking, interdisciplinary, and cross-sectorial approach; (e) They promote internal participation and are actively open to collaboration with others; (f) They have sufficient resources to carry out their goal, sharing and tapping the existing resources of their members. (p. 6)*

Chris Lowney writes that we need a network: “Where Jesuit institutions and individuals in them understand themselves as participants in a greater Jesuit mission that transcends the boundaries of their school or country, and are willing to lend their talent, time, or treasure as part of this broader mission.” (Chris Lowney, 1)

In this sense, what the society is asking us today is to be *faithful* to our fundamental tradition of responding to the needs of unique times, places and people; that is, to discover a way to be as we have never been before. We can only begin this journey if we come together, explore together and walk together. The present International Colloquium is a step in this direction, a sign that we want to be different in the future; that we really want to become a global network, as we understand it today; that we are beginning an irrevocable new path. That is why Fr. General Adolfo Nicolas SJ has also encouraged “all Jesuit secondary school networks to take advantage of this opportunity to advance the Society’s commitment to form leaders who can serve both the Church and our world.” Fr. General hopes that “by gathering as a global body of Jesuit secondary schools for the first time we can begin to establish ways of collectively preparing our students and school communities to address” our present challenges. As Fr. General has pointed out “the enormous challenges to Jesuit Education today require our best efforts in order for us to serve the mission that has been entrusted to us.” We are not going to find a better occasion than the Colloquium to explore together the meaning of our global network of schools. We cannot miss this unique opportunity if we want our schools to be relevant to our present challenges.

Of course, we have learned from the past and we are not naïve about the costs of the challenge. We know that we are called to a cultural change that affects us personally and in our schools. Fr. Jorge Cela warns us: “The process of cultural change in institutions does not

always come about smoothly. Structures which concentrate power are maintained, and they resist the invasion of networks which penetrate into the realms of 'reserved' information" (Jorge Cela, 2). "As in every cultural change, there is a period of confusion, adjustment, and creativity, in which resistance gives rise to conflicts but is also the spark of innovation." (p, 5)

We need to accept the challenge and find creatively ways to face it. As Fr. Adolfo Nicolas has challenged us we need to use our imagination to go to our own frontiers.

### *Jesuit Schools*

To continue our way of renewal we need to remember our roots, we need to remember that the sole reason for us having schools is for the apostolic fruit that is found in them. This is what motivated Saint Ignatius and his companions to open schools and embrace this apostolate. They founded the Society of Jesus with the idea of "helping souls." From the beginning they saw this purpose as requiring a qualified service to others and very soon they learned that schools were privileged places to accomplish it.

But Ignatius, wise as he was, also learned that schools, as social institutions, have a specific and structural good (an inner good) that had to be respected and that was not in contradiction with our apostolic mission: a place for *pietas*, for learning virtue and character, for opening the mind to knowledge and science, a place for the academics. For those reasons, Jesuit schools were seen as rigorous and solid schools in their own right and that motivated many people to send their children to study with the Jesuits in the first place. This rigor in our tradition: religious education, academics and integral education, remains so essential and even prescriptive in our current self-understanding. Saint Ignatius learned the importance of a solid intellectual preparation when he decided to study in some of the best and most prestigious universities in Europe of his time; he learned that his spiritual journey also meant a rigorous academic preparation. We have inherited this vision in our schools, and for this reason educating the whole person and academic excellence have been the benchmarks of our education. We also know that accomplishing this goal means in many instances some tension between these two dimensions of our work, but we have learned to do them both neither by

sacrificing one to the other; nor by allowing either to be given a cursory nod. We have to say today, again, that there is no excuse in a Jesuit school for not having strong academics. Nor is there any excuse for not having a strong formation of the whole person including a strong faith formation program.

As Fr. LaCroix argues, for Ignatius

*“The fact that formal education was a proper good in its own right, that it had its own inner dynamic, and that its contribution to a more human life in society was valid even without reference to “apostolic reasons.” It is important to bring this conviction out very clearly, because some might misconstrue Ignatius’ position so as to suspect that he would condone a vitiating of the internal integrity of an academic subject for the sake of furthering a religious goal. Quite the contrary was his mind... Ignatius was well aware that formal education has its own character, its own inner dynamic which must be preserved and enhanced if it was to be a specific means to attain the goal of the Society.” (p. 41)*

In other words, accomplishing the apostolic goals can only be done if we respect the “inner dynamic” of schooling, if we maintain our conversation with society and colleagues about the meaning of educating and fulfilling the expectations of a “good school” today. The Society has called us to engage in dialogue with other cultures as well as diverse people. In our case, this dialogue also entails a dialogue with the current educational cultures, with the other men and women who work with us in education: other educators, schools associations, parents, alumnae, education leaders and researchers. We need to engage in the conversation about the meaning of good education, good schooling and the best preparation that the young generations may receive for leading flourishing lives.

In the XVI century, Fr. Diego de Ledesma SJ, a professor at the Collegio Romano, wrote about why Jesuits consider educational institutions to be so important for our mission. F. Ledesma states four reasons, according to F. Kolvenbach:

*First, because they supply people with many advantages for practical living; secondly, because they contribute to the right government of public affairs and to the proper making of laws; third, because they give ornament, splendour, and perfection to our rational nature; and fourth, in what is most important, because they are the bulwark*

*of religion and guide us most surely in the achievement of our last end. (Kolvenbach 2007, 1)*

I want to point out that all these reasons show clearly that from the beginning Jesuits saw education as an optimal apostolic tool to carry on their mission. But Ledesma also claims that schools are important not only for religious reasons but for what we can call today secular reasons. The first reason tells us that education is important because it provides students with the skills and knowledge they need for a professional life. Reason 2 emphasizes the inevitable connection between education and society (Education, in the Jesuit tradition, has always been conceived as an excellent mean for preparing good citizens and leaders). Reason 3 points out that education develops the human potential and reason 4 stresses that all of this brings us deeper into our religious experience. Of course, for Ledesma, as for us today, our spiritual experience reveals the deeper connections among all these elements.

In our tradition these three elements: strong academics, education to all dimensions of human life, and working for justice and caring for the environment contribute to a better education of our faith. Yet each also stands in its own right and entails its own inner dynamic. We need to find our unique way of doing this formation of the whole person in the terms of depth and imagination that Fr. Nicolas has invited us to do through the power of our charism to give the most universal scope possible to these three elements. This is the way we understand *magis* today: using our imagination to disclose new depth in a culture of superficiality. *Magis* does not “imply comparison with others or measurement of progress against an absolute standard” (CJE # 109), but rather an invitation to the full development of our potentialities, to new depths that can open for us new possibilities of better human beings.

Pope Benedict the XVI has invited us to reach our frontiers. He counts on us “to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach.” While we all like the image of going to the frontiers and sometimes we can romanticize about them; Fr. Adolfo Nicolas has reminded us that the frontiers, many times, are not far from us; in effect, the frontiers are within our own apostolates and in our case in our school: they are the frontiers of the new generations of parents, teachers and students; of the secular societies that affect our schools, the frontiers of the human brain and the current developments of this area

of research, the frontiers of not only being a global network but work as such and the frontiers of our identity and mission in our over changing context.

### *Jesuit Schools*

But being true to our tradition also means to offer a really Jesuit/Ignatian education. Important as it is, it is not enough to offer high quality education alone. We need to build strong *Jesuit* schools that embody the identity, and our way of proceeding, which invite our students and their parents to join us in our mission. Yes, our identity is mission driven. We strive for schools that can easily meet any academic standards but we also strive to call our students to a life beyond the mere academic or economic success. We strive for educating *men and women for others and with others* that see themselves immersed in a social and political context that requires an engagement with reality. We have never intended to educate for the *fuga mundi* since our spirituality is one that finds God in all things and that recognizes the relationship between human history and the kingdom of God. As John O'Malley maintains, the Jesuits from the beginning "wanted to preserve the best of two great educational ideals, the intellectual rigor and professionalism of the scholastic system and the more personalist, societal, and even practical goals of the humanists" (p. 69). We know that Jesuit schools live in the tension between being Jesuit and being schools, but this tension is the source of depth in a time with superficiality and reductionism seem to be taking hold of many educational systems.

What makes a Jesuit school *Jesuit*?

I cannot answer this question completely today. Some regions and provinces have already produced excellent documents on this matter. In our last ICAJE meeting we decided to work on a document that can help us in this discernment and that can be a step in building the global network. The idea is that this document can be a follow up of the two previous documents: *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* and *The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm*. This new document should update the previous ones to the new context, the new frontiers and the new challenges that we face today after more than 25 years of the first one. This

should be also an exciting moment for our schools to renew, change and strengthen our identity to better serve our mission.

But I think it is safe to say that any Jesuit school to be *Jesuit* needs at least to be:

1. A mission driven community convinced that service of faith, promotion of justice, creative engagement with cultures and religious traditions, and reconciliation with God, one another and creation, are central to whom we are and we strive to become.
2. It is a world-affirming education that stresses that God is laboring in all things and can be discovered “in all natural and human events” (CJE #21); as Fr. Nadal used to say: *The world is our house*; an idea that this International Colloquium has also embraced. We affirm the “radical goodness of the world” (CJE #23) and although aware of the shadows of our time we present hope and love at the center of our education. This is even the way we approach the new generations of students, parents and teachers; we know that God is already working within them and we want to contribute to God’s good work within them.
3. We offer an education that aims to develop the whole person, all dimensions of human life. For us integral education means to educate the mind, the body and the heart, the social, the political, the ethical, the emotional and the spiritual aspects of human life. We also believe that the spiritual dimension is the key element for any integral education.
4. Care, concern and respect for each individual person of the school, be it the student, the teacher or the staff. The *cura personalis* is central to our tradition and we need to make sure this is really happening in our schools. Today we also know that this *cura personalis* has to be embodied in healthy and safe school environments that prevent from any form of abuse be it psychological, emotional, sexual or physical. We have to guarantee schools where our students feel respected, accepted and free to grow.
5. A particular concern for the poor and the marginalized. The preferential option for the poor that Jesus preaches in the gospel is part of our way of proceeding. Every Jesuit school should do what it can “to make Jesuit education *available to everyone*, including the poor and the disadvantaged.” (CJE #86) Fe y Alegria and other Jesuit or Jesuit inspired schools, like Cristo Rey, working with the poor are a living testimony of the great effort made in recent decades for bringing quality education to the disadvantaged in the Jesuit tradition.

We can only dream of the possibilities for even more quality education for those in need in a global network of Jesuit schools.

6. Finally our education is conceived as a service to the Gospel and to the Church. We see schools as “a part of the apostolic mission of the Church in building the Kingdom of God.” (CJE #93)

So we are invited to walk our path with the same generosity that those before us did in their time and context. We do this as part of our living tradition of “helping souls,” serving God and his Church. We do it affirming our historical convictions: education open to all where the economic status is not the decisive factor; education of the whole person, academic excellence, education for justice rooted in our experience of faith; faith that leads to reconciliation with ourselves, the others and the environment. We strive to educate competent, compassionate, committed and self-aware student that see their lives as vocations for a better world for all. “Men and women for and with others.

The challenges are not small but we are invited to address them from the strength of our network. God assist us in our path. We are inviting to make our pilgrimage in our own time and context.

## References

Cela, J. (2012, April). *How to network without getting diluted in the attempt*. Paper presented at International networking in the Society of Jesus, Boston College, Boston, MA.

*Final document*. (2012). International networking in the Society of Jesus, Conference at Boston College, Boston, MA.

General congregation XXXV. In (2009). J. Padberg (Ed.), *Jesuit Life & Mission Today* (pp. 705-836). Saint Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources.

LaCroix, W. L. (1989) *The Jesuit Spirit of Education: Ignatius, Tradition and Today's Questions*. Kansas City: Rockhurst College.

Lowney, C. (2012, April). *Contribution to the Jesuit networking workshop at Boston College*. Paper presented at International networking in the Society of Jesus, Boston College, Boston, MA.

Nicolas, A. (2010) *Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today*. Mexico City.

O'Malley, J. (2000). From the 1599 ratio studiorum to the present: A humanistic tradition? In V. Duminuco (Ed.), *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives* (pp. 127-144). New York: Fordham University Press.

The characteristics of Jesuit education. In (2000). V. Duminuco (Ed.), *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives* (pp. 161-230). New York: Fordham University Press.