

Companions in Mission: Pluralism in Action*

**Mission Day Keynote Address
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It is a great pleasure for me to be present here at Loyola Marymount University as you devote a day of reflection to your shared mission. As this university stands poised, in two year's time, to celebrate its centenary, your history and current commitments exhibit a long list of distinguished lay colleagues, Catholic and non-Catholic, who have served you well as faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and students. No real history of your institution would do justice without their conspicuous inclusion. And for over thirty-five years now, since Marymount College merged with Loyola University to form Loyola Marymount, you have learned to meld the complementary Catholic charisms of the Jesuits, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary and the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Orange.

Located in the midst of an important global city on the Pacific rim, you have imbibed Los Angeles' striking cultural and religious diversity. Your curriculum includes not only, as might be expected, a concentration in Catholic Studies but also one in Jewish Studies. A few years ago you hosted one of the largest gatherings for Buddhist-Christian dialogue in history. I note also, with approbation, the work of the Center for Ignatian Spirituality in nurturing, among your faculty and staff, participation in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius and, more broadly, in its continuing attention to spirituality.

It is, thus, easy for me in this setting to broach today a topic—Jesuits and their companions in mission—which is not exactly new in Jesuit discourse. Already in 1976, Father Pedro Arrupe, then the Superior General of the Jesuits, in his address at Philadelphia's Saint Joseph's University entitled "Pioneers of the Spirit: Jesuit-Lay Collaboration," suggested that such companionship in mission depends crucially on relationships based on mutual trust, nurtured by frequent exchanges, structured in flexible

* This version of Father Nicolas' Keynote Address includes several paragraphs omitted in delivery from his prepared text as well as impromptu remarks added during delivery, indicated here in a separate font.

ways and forming a community of service.¹ A meeting at Creighton University in 1988 focused on this same topic of Jesuit-lay collaboration. It was followed in 1989 by the Assembly '89 convocation at Georgetown University, which brought together the largest group ever of Jesuits and lay colleagues engaged in higher education.

Two Jesuit general congregations (the chief legislative body for the Jesuits when in session)-- General Congregation 34 in 1995 and General Congregation 35 in 2008— issued decrees explicitly urging close two-way dialogue in Jesuit-lay collaboration. Father Kolvenbach, our former Superior General, addressed this theme again at Creighton University in 2004, in an address entitled “Cooperating with Each Other in Mission.” And recently, the Jesuit Provincials of the United States devoted one section of their national strategic pastoral planning document to “Apostolic Partnerships.”

Nor is this theme of partnership in mission absent from the conversation of non-Jesuit co-workers as they join task forces to reflect on mission and identity issues in universities, high schools, retreat and social action centers. So we presently lack neither helpful documents to prime our conversation nor a fruitful start on it. Yet many—both Jesuits and their non-Jesuit colleagues—fear the conversation on this issue has not yet become deep and penetrating; has not yet sufficiently focused on a non-paternalistic dialogue among equal co-workers and companions. Some think we need to ponder more deeply the implications for long-term mission goals stemming from serious diminution in the number of Jesuits. Others point out that tensions and divergent vocabularies on this theme remain unaddressed. If nothing else, I want my comments today to unleash a fruitful dialogue on this theme of companionship and entice Jesuits and co-workers to a deeper probe about how to make collaboration in mission more fruitful in their common work here at Loyola Marymount University.

Co-Workers and Companions

First, a brief word about nomenclature. I have chosen the two terms, co-workers and companions, in preference to partnership, to stress clearly the two-way dialogue of companions in mission. Partnership can be, sometimes, a paternalistic term or imply an adjective, ‘junior,’ to the partnership. Both terms I have chosen resonate deeply in the Jesuit tradition and language. From the beginning, long before they were Jesuits, Ignatius and his, then, still mainly lay, first companions saw themselves mirroring the first 72 disciples sent out on mission by Jesus. Jesus said to those first disciples: “The harvest is

abundant but the laborers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send many workers into the vineyard” (Luke 10:2).

That image of Jesuits as co-workers in the vineyard resonated in the first deliberation of Ignatius and his companions on whether, indeed, to establish the Jesuits as an approved order in the church. It gets taken up as a central metaphor in the crucial chapter 7 of the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, redacted under the aegis of Saint Ignatius. Chapter 7 deals with how Jesuits are to choose what missions to engage. The norms found there for choice of mission are these: (1) helping souls, that is, helping people; (2) the greater glory of God; (3) going where there is greatest need; (4) searching for the *magis*, that is, for what exceeds mediocrity and moves toward excellence, going beyond what has already been achieved; (5) taking on works, also, where no other workers are present or available; (6) moving sometimes to controversial frontiers of action or knowledge, even breaking settled boundaries; (7) undertaking works that promise a more universal good and a deeper reach of contact; and (8) creating or joining communities of solidarity in seeking justice. These norms continue in force to this day as the Jesuits consider establishing or continuing a work under their own sponsorship or joining, as co-workers, in someone else’s mission and work.

You will notice that I speak not only of Jesuit-sponsored works but of Jesuits becoming companions and co-workers in someone else’s work – for example, in secularly incorporated works of civic betterment, social advocacy and justice; or even in someone else’s university. From the beginning, Jesuits saw being co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard as something other than always being in simple command or control of the mission. Yet even when they are co-workers in someone else’s mission, Jesuits (alone or in groups) choose it because of its resonance with their own deepest sense of mission.

One virtue of this rich metaphor of being co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard is that it signals clearly that Jesuits never thought they controlled the deepest fruit of any ministry or could fully shape it on their own. They were sent into the Lord’s (not their own) vineyard and longed for co-workers.

The early Jesuits spawned numerous autonomous lay confraternities for spiritual formation and social service. A notable example is the early House of St. Martha, a pioneering halfway house for prostitute and battered women in Rome, with its accompanying confraternity, the Company of Grace. Similarly, early itinerant Jesuit

missionaries created lay confraternities to continue the work in the missionary's absence. In several notable cases (as in Togagawa, Japan, and, much later, in China after the Communist Revolution), these lay confraternities nurtured the faith when Jesuit missionaries were expelled. As a recent history of these early Jesuit confraternities exhibits in its title, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord*, the Jesuits easily extended the metaphor of co-workers in the vineyard to these lay confraternities. The Jesuit Sodality movement, now known as the Christian Life Community movement (CLC), is an outgrowth of these confraternities. And Loyola Marymount University, to its credit, has more students involved in Christian Life Communities than any other Jesuit university in America.

The second term, companion, is also deeply etched in Jesuit imagination. The name the incipient order, rather audaciously, chose for itself was “The Company of Jesus”—not a military company but a friends' company. Ignatius had experienced, at La Storta outside of Rome, a mystical revelation in which he saw God the Father and Jesus, and heard the Father say to him that God would place Ignatius and his first co-workers as *companions* in the mission and work of Jesus—Jesus with his cross.

So clearly Jesuits bring to their identity and sense of mission a complexly religious and distinctively Christian set of metaphors. Nevertheless, throughout Jesuit history, Jesuits also saw themselves as co-workers and companions with non-Christians, with all men and women of good will—men and women with a good heart. One thinks of the mission to China where the Jesuits ran the Imperial observatory and worked as artists in the Emperor's Court. Or one recalls the collaboration of Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqui in translating Euclid's *Elements* into Chinese. While Jesuits bring their own distinctively Catholic, Christian identity to whatever work they join, they know that others' projects are not always conceived explicitly in Christian or even religious terms. They join such projects, with the identities that are their own, because they see deep consonance between the non-religious mission and their own criteria for mission. Similarly, they ask members of other-religious traditions or simply men and women of good will to join in their own sponsored works without, in any way, asking of them that they deny or negate their own identities in the common work.

To be sure, for some the term ‘mission’ is suspect since it may smack of proselytism or, for some former colonial countries, of the imposition of western values. Yet the term also has a wider meaning, used even in secular settings, to mean clarity about goals and the strategies to achieve them that drive a corporation or a non-profit entity, like this university. Historically, Jesuits have run schools (for example, in Islamic lands) where they explicitly promised they would not try to convert anyone. They did so because of the work’s resonance with their mission goals of helping people, of reaching toward the greater or more universal good, and of cultivating a faith that does justice. In a similar way, contemporary Jesuits have established the Jesuit Refugee Service because it is a work of great need and one where not many others are available to carry it out. It is a work where Jesuits are few, indeed, but where co-workers of other faiths and cultures are many—and where the harvest has been very great!

Identity is who we most deeply are and what we bring to any endeavor or work. It is always to be respected, honored and treasured. The identity we bring to dialogue is our greatest contribution and enrichment. Mission is the work we do in common. As Father Kolvenbach once put it in an address to representatives from Jesuit universities around the world: “Mission is not imposed but proposed.”² The ideal co-worker, he suggested, is a competent, conscientious person, capable of compassion and well-educated in solidarity. The worst error in common mission, he maintained, is to try to lead all by the selfsame road. Just as there are many different forms of identity, so there are many different ways to contribute to a common mission. All of them can embody one or other of the Jesuit norms for mission.

I want now to rehearse, briefly, some of the things Jesuits have said about being co-workers and companions with non-Jesuits in common works, their own or others. I will merely highlight some of the most compelling statements in the various documents and published talks. Further reading of the pertinent documents would be fruitful for all Jesuits and their co-workers. But my main aim, as I noted in the beginning, is to encourage a deeper conversation, beyond the documents, among those who labor today in our common works. We need to move from mere talk to a common walk; from discourse to practices; from ideas to rich engagement in the project, like Loyola Marymount University, that we mutually share and treasure.

Jesuit Documents and Discourse
on Jesuit and non-Jesuit Companionship in Shared Mission

At Jesuit General Congregation 34, held in 1995, the assembled delegates promulgated a ground-breaking decree, normative for the whole Society of Jesus, entitled “Cooperation with Laity in Mission.” Deeply influenced by shifts in ecclesiology and by the church’s self- understanding since Vatican Council II, this decree foresaw that the church of the new millennium would rightly be called “the church of the laity.” The delegates averred: “We foresee the expansion of lay apostolic leadership in Jesuit works in years to come and commit ourselves to assist this development.”³ Thus, the decree called on all Jesuits to foster an attitude of readiness to cooperate, to listen attentively, and to learn from others. Jesuits, they claimed, must be both “‘men for others’ and ‘men with others.’”⁴

Not leaving this shift to chance, the Congregation foresaw the need for the Jesuits’ own on-going formation, so that they might listen to others, learn from their spirituality and face together the difficulties of genuine collaboration.⁵ To be sure, a common mission needed “a clear mission statement.” But there should be no mistake about the sway and extent of inclusive collaboration. “All those engaged in the work should exercise co-responsibility and be engaged in discernment and participative decision-making.”⁶ Clearly, a lay person can be the director of a Jesuit-sponsored work and exercise authority over his or her Jesuit co-workers—a tough point for some Jesuits. Rather than seeing Jesuit-lay collaboration as some potential diminishment, the delegates asserted that “this transformation can enrich these works and expand their Ignatian character.”⁷ Finally, the decree ends with the firm commitment: “Collaboration with the laity is a constitutive element of our way of proceeding and a grace calling for personal, communal and institutional renewal.”⁸

Reflecting on this document, Father Kolvenbach, in his address at Creighton University in 2004, notes that Jesuits have sometimes been remiss in following this strong commitment enunciated at GC 34. “We have to admit that the full assimilation of the meaning and true spirit of mutually respectful collaboration has come slowly to us.”⁹ He re-affirms GC34’s commitment: “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.”¹⁰

As Father Kolvenbach saw it, we face a new question. “For there to be a partnership of equality, the question changes from: ‘How can lay women and men assist

Jesuits in their ministry?’ The new question emerges: ‘How can Jesuits serve lay women and men in their ministries?’” Hence, Father Kovlenbach notes, Jesuits must make sure their use of ‘us’ and ‘our’ is truly inclusive—where it means ‘we all’—and not exclusive, where it intends ‘we only.’ He asserts: “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.”¹¹

In a notable way, Father Kolvenbach, in this Omaha address, linked the document on Jesuit-lay collaboration from GC34 with another decree of GC 34 on “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Society.” He notes that GC 34 joined John Paul II in calling on all men and women of good will, especially Catholics, to make the essential equality of women a lived reality.¹² And he goes on to point out that GC 34 committed the Society “in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission.”¹³ In some Jesuit works, perhaps, this solidarity has remained more a lip-service ideal than an obvious ‘taken-for-granted’ reality. This may suggest for us another area for our further conversation about Jesuit/non-Jesuit companionship in mission.

In other of its decrees, GC 34 stressed that ecumenism is a new and essential way to be Catholic today and that inter-religious dialogue—between Christians and those of non-Christian religions or those of secular faith—should be made a Jesuit apostolic priority. GC 34, however, did not deal as inclusively as it might have, in its decree on “Cooperation with Laity in Mission,” with these ecumenical and inter-religious themes. Hence, Decree 6, “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission,” the recent follow-up document from GC 35, held just a year ago, tends to avoid using the intra-ecclesial language of lay and clerical and to be much more ecumenical and inter-religious in tone.

To be sure, “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission” picks up the theme of companions and co-workers as “it renews our commitment to apostolic collaboration and to a profound sharing of labor.”¹⁴ But it spells out that: “We are enriched by members of our own faith, but also by people from other religious traditions, those men and women of good will...with whom we labor in seeking a more just world.”¹⁵ It should not cause surprise that Jesuits, whose originating charism dictates that they attempt to discern and find God present and laboring in all things, might also try to find that same God working in and present to all persons, whatever their identities, traditions, cultures or religions.

A story from one of our schools in Japan illustrates this point. A Buddhist wanted to join us because, as he said, Buddhism doesn't have an explicit and developed philosophy of education, as do the Jesuits, who have been at it for 450 years. He was very happy to be accepted on the faculty but disappointed when the principal told him just to teach his classes—the Jesuits would do the rest. That, of course, was an old mentality—not very collegial. But fortunately the minds of Jesuits have changed. The Buddhist is now vice principal of that school and very likely will be principal before long.

As time went on another Buddhist, a young teacher, applied for a job but hid from the interviewers that he belonged to a militant, anti-religion (and not Japanese) sect. After he was hired, he began to complain about everything, especially about having a chapel in the school. He saw no meaning in the chapel and thought it was imposing religion on the children. When it became clear that his complaints about the chapel were an excuse for his general negativity, people tried to convince him to leave and go someplace where he could be happy. But to no avail. He said he had a right not to be forced to leave. So the other teachers went to the Buddhist who was now vice principal and asked if he could help. He said he would try, so he went to the complainer and said, "Young man, you don't understand where you are. You are complaining about having a chapel, but in this school, the moment you enter the gate, everything is chapel." The complainer then understood and decided to leave and seek another job.

The point I want to make is that sometimes a Buddhist like the vice principal might have a better grasp of what we mean by a good Christian or Jesuit education than some of us do. It's the whole experience that counts. It's not just what we do in the chapel, which is very meaningful and keeps our hearts alive. It's also what we do in the classrooms, the research labs, the residence halls, and so forth. It's the whole operation that is working for depth, for creativity in the lives of people today, for a new humanity in our world and in the future. This man—this Buddhist—got it. We need more companions in mission like him.

GC 35's document on collaboration mirrors a non-Eurocentric vision of the many places, including Asia and Africa but, also, increasingly now even North and South America and Europe, where Jesuits find themselves as co-workers in someone else's work. Correlatively, they engage with Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Moslems or even agnostic co-workers in their own works. It is significant that the Congregation explicitly acknowledged "the more diverse community of those with whom we have been called in common mission."¹⁶ In its conclusion, GC35 states: "The Society desires strong relationships in mission with as many collaborators in the Lord's vineyard as possible."¹⁷

Clarity of Mission and Formation

The documents of both GC 34 and GC 35 on collaboration emphasize that any work under explicit Jesuit sponsorship or one that bears the Jesuit name should be underpinned by a clear mission statement. Organizational sociology has long ago taught us that the most effective and productive organizations have clear mission statements and assiduously operate out of them to guide ongoing collaborative planning and work. They also allow a wide participative buy-in by co-workers. The shadow-side ingredient, however, in the laudable effort to expand the scope of Jesuit mission, to make it more ecumenically inclusive, lies in the temptation, precisely because of this expansive inclusiveness, to water down the mission into a vague and, often, quite vapid ‘secular’ sounding rhetoric. This evokes, at best, a mere notional assent and deeply moves no one. Such mission statements can be thin gruel, indeed!

Clearly, the Jesuit sense of mission flows, as I enumerated earlier, from the criteria for the Society’s choice of mission. To be sure, different Jesuit works will highlight some elements of the criteria more or less, but certain elements of the Jesuit mission remain non-negotiable. These include a commitment to excellence, flowing from the *magis*; a clear articulation and enactment of the faith that does justice; inter-religious dialogue; a profound sense of an underlying spiritual dynamism; and a careful process of discernment. For Jesuits, these norms stem from clearly Catholic-Christian premises. Others, however, (as experience has shown) can contribute to the mission and dynamic of Jesuit works from their own specific religious identities or on more secular humanistic grounds. They will never be constrained to embrace the Catholic faith or forfeit their own identity. Yet all companions in mission in a Jesuit-sponsored work will recognize that, for their Jesuit colleagues, the main rationale for mission will continue to be deeply rooted in their concern for furthering Jesus’ preaching and enactment of the Kingdom of God in its justice and right relationships.

Turning to formation, in Jesuit parlance this term implies a spiritual depth of affective bonding and a set of practices, including the Spiritual Exercises, which shape companionship into a common mission. As Father Kolvenbach articulated it in his Omaha address in 2004: “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.”¹⁸ While the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola are radically Christo-centric, centered on the core notion of discipleship and the Kingdom of God, experience and the testimony of non-Christians suggest that important

elements of the Spiritual Exercises, especially those concerned with spiritual freedom, equipoise and discernment, can be fruitfully appropriated even by non-Christians.

I would like to underline this idea that the Spiritual Exercises can be shared by non-Christians. Even though Christ is at the heart of the full experience of the Exercises, it is also true that their structure involves a process of liberation—of opening to new horizons—that can benefit people who do not share our life of faith. This is something I would like to see explored more and more. We particularly experienced this challenge in Japan when non-Christians came to visit and asked if they could make the Exercises. This triggered a reflection, and it is one that we need to continue. What are the dynamics in the Exercises that non-believers might make their own to find wider horizons in life, a greater sense of spiritual freedom?

An important part of formation for mission in a Jesuit context is discernment. This may seem like an esoteric term. But as GC 35 explains, discernment enables us to engage the world “through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, involving evaluation through reflection, for the sake of action and with openness, always, to further evaluation.”¹⁹ Discernment and evaluation entail also an openness to the Transcendent and the unexpected, what religious voices characteristically call grace. In one sense, the meaning of discernment can be found in the famous formula of the Jesuit scholar and philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan: be attentive; be intelligent; be reasonable; be responsible.

And, he adds, if you have faith, then be in love with God.

And I would add that if you are attuned to the inner movements of the Spirit, to where your heart is vibrating at its deepest level, then you will know where God is working in your lives. All of this has relevance to education in Jesuit schools, where we want people to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in love—and thus filled with freedom and in touch with the best of themselves.

Formation in discernment and mission stems principally from serious conversation, where we pay attention to experience, reflect on that experience and then make good decisions, together, based on what is learned through the process. It always involves sharing our own stories. Common mission becomes real through genuine relationships of trust and through shared actions and practices. Joint action can challenge co-workers to act themselves into new ways of thinking and being. Joint action can encourage them to live more consequentially as contemplatives in action and authentic companions.

Will such companionship of equals sharing a mission truly happen? Will it work? Are we starting the process too late in time? The tensions between diversity (which is to be treasured) and a deeper sense of shared identity in a group that wants to nurture some continuity in identity and mission can and will get resolved, if they are continually subjected to on-going dialogue and conversation. In today's world, inexorably, we all are thrown together by forces of globalization that inter-connect us profoundly. Minimally, we must learn to tolerate our differences but, ideally, we can find a way—if we see difference and 'the other' as a rich resource and not some threat—to meld the differences into a vital shared purpose. Diversity can be seen and appreciated as an opportunity to find God actively at work in fresh, new ways. Jesuits have found their long history of involvement in many cultures, traditions and religions to be something which profoundly enhances and clarifies and, indeed, shapes their very identity.

It is useful to distinguish between mere tolerance and co-existence, as in a zoo, and the true inter-action of companionship, as in the ecology of a forest. A zoo is a place where an abundant quantity of diverse animals co-habit and reside in separate cages or enclaves but they do not, please God, too directly interact (or some of them will perish). This is difference as mere co-habitation. A forest, on the other hand, offers us a vibrant example of vital plurality in interaction. It is a place where distinguishably different kinds of organic life interact, regenerate, cross-pollinate and flourish together. Or, to recast, somewhat, St. Paul's rich metaphor, in our common mission there are many gifts, identities, cultures, religions and secular traditions but only one body.

Well, at the local level you can gage better where the conversation about becoming and being better companions and co-workers in a common mission needs to begin. You will grasp more concretely any obstacles or pitfalls to a fruitful further reciprocal dialogue about companionship. You will know already existing best practices for collaboration in mission and where the likely more promising next steps lie. As a final point, I want to remind you that Ignatius Loyola privileged, as a ministry equal to university teaching, social work or the giving of the Spiritual Exercises, the humble, down-to-earth yet exacting task of genuine spiritual conversation. He intuited that, in authentic conversation about mutual mission, God was always active, present and profoundly to be found.

I thank you for this opportunity to share these reflections and I express the hope that they will stimulate the kind of conversations that will make this a truly successful Mission Day at Loyola Marymount University.

Endnotes

¹ Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Pioneers of the Spirit: Jesuit-Lay Collaboration in Higher Education,” St. Joseph’s University, Philadelphia, 31 July 1976.

² Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Jesuit University in the Light of the Ignatian Charism” (¶45), Rome, 27 May 2001.

³ GC 34, d. 13.2.

⁴ GC 34, d. 13.4.

⁵ Cf. GC 34, d.13.4.

⁶ GC 34, d.13.13.

⁷ CG 34, d.13.20.

⁸ GC 34, d.13.26.

⁹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “Cooperating with Each Other in Mission,” Creighton University, Omaha, 7 October 2004.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Cf. GC 34, d.14.5.

¹³ GC 34, d.14.16.

¹⁴ GC 35, d.6.2.

¹⁵ GC 35, d.6.3.

¹⁶ GC 35, d.6.7.

¹⁷ GC 35, d.6.24.

¹⁸ Kolvenbach, “Cooperating with Each Other in Mission.”

¹⁹ GC 35, d.6.9.