

Task Force on Peace and Reconciliation - Position Paper

Reconciliation and the Intellectual Apostolate

Executive Summary

The intellectual apostolate plays a key role in responding to the call of the 36th General Congregation to a ministry of reconciliation that has three dimensions: reconciliation with God, within humanity and with creation itself. Through our global networks and resources, Jesuit post-secondary institutions, research centres and peace institutes offer unique opportunities to foster understanding, dialogue and reconciliation between divided communities. Each carries out this ministry of reconciliation in a particular context that may be marked by alienation and division due to the legacy of injustice, violence and colonialism.

In the spirit of GC36, Jesuit post-secondary institutions are called to promote peace and reconciliation in a variety of ways. Through depth of inquiry and critical thinking, we assist students in understanding the roots of conflict and injustice that divide communities. Through the liberal arts and social sciences, we help students appreciate multiple perspectives, forming them to be engaged global citizens able to build bridges across cultural and ideological divides. Through service learning experiences, Jesuit educational institutions immerse students in the lived reality of division, inviting them to promote a culture of dialogue, encounter and healing. Through research, Jesuit universities and institutes promote a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict with a view to developing initiatives that foster peace and reconciliation. Through local, national and global networks, Jesuit institutions are well positioned to advocate for those affected by conflict, in cases even convening parties formerly estranged by division and hostility. Working through a truly global network, Jesuit post-secondary institutions can map best practices to facilitate wider collaboration between them in peace and reconciliation.

Ignatian Foundations

Decree 1 of GC36, entitled “Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice”, reminds us that the call to peace and reconciliation is deeply rooted in the Christian and specifically Ignatian traditions. It begins with St. Paul’s claim that

God reconciles the world to himself in Christ and entrusts to us “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18).¹

In reading the signs of the times, Jesuits and collaborators are invited to discern the need for reconciliation in our own particular contexts. This may take the form of reconciliation with God, where many are alienated from spirituality due to materialism, secularism, atheism and other ideologies. In this dimension, Ignatian spirituality offers a means of hope, bringing modern secular society into dialogue with the joy of the Christian gospel as well as other faith traditions. Reconciliation within humanity takes the form of inclusion of those marginalized by ethnic tension, violence and the effects of racism, colonialism and economic exploitation. In the current climate, the rise of intolerance, polarization and religious fundamentalism give this dimension of reconciliation a particular sense of urgency. Finally, the need for reconciliation with creation has become especially acute due to the unprecedented scale of environmental degradation, social inequality and other effects of the economy of exclusion that Pope Francis has critiqued in his landmark encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. In caring for our common home, we are called to personal and social conversion in fostering right relations with God, with each other and with creation itself.

Using the evocative image of St. Ignatius and the First Companions at Venice, Decree 1 stresses the value of friendship, simplicity and closeness to the poor in forming Jesuits and collaborators as a “discerning community of disciples”.² Called to labour with Christ the Reconciler, we are invited to live simply and respond creatively to the specific need for peace and reconciliation in our particular context. As women and men of the Spiritual Exercises, we are co-workers with the God of the *Contemplatio*, who always labours in creation, helping build God’s reign of justice and peace. Attentive to the Spirit, we are called to be present to Christ in the poor and marginalized, befriending them, understanding them, advocating for them and learning from them. We are invited to be artisans

¹ GC36, Decree 1: “Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice”, introductory quotation.

² GC36, Decree 1, para. 7 to 16.

of a culture of mercy, which expresses itself, as Pope Francis puts it, “in concrete gestures rather than mere words”.³

Within this context, the intellectual apostolate has a special role to play. While all Jesuit ministries are called “to build bridges, to foster peace’, Decree 1 highlights the role of educational works in forming men and women “committed to reconciliation”. Through depth of reflection and solid intellectual formation, such learning environments are to foster in their students a depth of interiority, a growth in personal integration and an ability “to confront obstacles to reconciliation and propose solutions”.⁴ Such a transformation of culture and society is challenging indeed. To fulfill this mission, Jesuit intellectual apostolates ought to provide mutual support and collaboration through networks with each other and with others of good will. By so doing, they will live out the *magis*, extending God’s care of the neediest in our midst and advancing God’s work of “reconciling the world to himself in Christ”.⁵

Challenges and Opportunities

Rooted in our Ignatian tradition – and benefitting from extensive local and global networks – Jesuit post-secondary institutions have great potential to promote peace and reconciliation. Yet the personal, communal and institutional conversion that is required in this process is never easy. The long-term effects of division and conflict can be complicated and intractable. The sins of the past often remain in the present, appearing in new and unpredictable forms. The legacy of mistrust, hatred and violence between communities may take generations to heal and cannot be resolved with short-term programs or simplistic solutions, however well intentioned.

In reading the signs of the times, the following trends present themselves as challenges and opportunities for Jesuit post-secondary institutions in the ministry of peace and reconciliation:

³ Address of Pope Francis to GC36, 24 October 2016, cited in GC36, Decree 1.

⁴ GC36, Decree 1, para. 33 and 34.

⁵ GC36, Decree 1, para. 40.

- 1) **Legacy of colonialism:** In confronting the injustices of our time, Jesuit educational institutions are called to build bridges between communities that have been divided by the legacy of ethnic, social and economic marginalization in the wake of colonialism. Such efforts are complicated at times by the historical reality of the Society's own participation in such forces of dominance, exploitation and exclusion. In some contexts, for instance, Jesuit institutions have benefited, either directly or indirectly, from colonial practices of slavery or been collaborators in the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. While some Jesuit institutions have championed the rights of the poor and marginalized, others may have defended the interests of a privileged elite. In such cases, reconciliation initiatives may be painful, controversial and counter-cultural as we face the difficult truth of a legacy of collaboration or complicity. If such efforts are sincere and inclusive of the marginalized themselves, however, they may be leaven in societies that are seeking to promote peace and reconciliation but lack the tools or spaces to do so.

- 2) **Ethnic and sectarian division:** Another historical reality that challenges Jesuit efforts of peace and reconciliation is past participation in ethnic and sectarian strife, including civil war. This is particularly apparent in situations where Jesuit institutions were enmeshed in ethnic and religious conflict or were perceived as being on one side or the other. In such instances, Jesuit educational works face the challenge of institutional conversion, reaching out beyond a particular group to promote mutual understanding, meaningful encounter and respectful dialogue. In this, they offer hope to other social organizations that seek to redress past wrongs, opening up spaces to welcome those who had been excluded. Refugees, migrants and immigrants present a special challenge – and opportunity – to the intellectual apostolate as they seek a safe space for dialogue in the midst of xenophobia and fear-mongering. In some cases, Jesuit institutions have acted as convenors for groups that had formerly been estranged. Moreover, our teaching and research facilities, including peace institutes, help to shed light on the origins of such conflicts and the creative ways in which communities can come together to move toward truth and reconciliation.

- 3) **Political and ideological polarization:** In living out the ministry of reconciliation, Jesuit works are increasingly challenged by what former Superior General Adolfo Nicolas has termed “the globalization of superficiality”.⁶ If Jesuit post-secondary institutions are to promote depth of understanding, depth of analysis and depth of commitment, how are they to do so in a modern world characterized by superficial media that can contribute to political and ideological polarization? Amidst the cacophony of voices in society and the blogosphere – some espousing “alternative facts”, intolerance and extremism – our mission of forming agents of reconciliation seems challenging indeed. Amidst such polarization, it is not obvious how best to communicate the Jesuit charism of “finding God in all things” and the Ignatian presupposition of putting a good interpretation on a neighbour’s statement.⁷ At the same time, students and others in society are hungry for deeper meaning in their lives, for an intellectual and spiritual depth that is found in our institutions of higher education. The hallmarks of Jesuit education, including the liberal arts tradition, offer such people a meaningful way of navigating through the morass of a public discourse that can exclude and isolate others.
- 4) **The Technological Revolution:** Advances in technology have accelerated economic growth but also economic disparities between rich and poor. Frequently, the poor do not have access to the latest technology, whether it be medical, information or industrial technology. While new forms of technology can link people across great distances, “virtual reality” often isolates people from their immediate surroundings, making them oblivious to the suffering of the poor and marginalized in their midst. As innovators and educators, how can Jesuit universities and colleges promote a healthy use of technology, one that promotes the dignity and development of the human person and society rather than their isolation and fragmentation?

⁶ Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today”, address to international Jesuit intellectual apostolate gathering at Mexico City, 23 April 2010.

⁷ Sp. Ex. 22.

How can Jesuit institutions of higher learning use technology to unite rather than divide, to promote peace rather than hostility?

- 5) **Pluralism as Threat or Invitation:** As we read the signs of the times, we can often trace alienation within humanity to underlying assumptions about diversity. To some, fear of difference can lead to attitudes and policies that isolate and exclude those of another race, culture, religion, gender or way of life. In such a context, how can Jesuit educational institutions embrace the reality of diversity to find “God in all things”, including beauty, truth and goodness in traditions and cultures other than one’s own? In addressing pervasive mistrust, misunderstanding and fear of difference, what skills can we teach our students to listen, encounter and engage with diverse populations in healthy ways? To what extent do our institutions model this approach for members of the wider community? What are some practical ways that Jesuit universities and colleges can promote a culture of encounter and dialogue?

Possible Responses

In our research, teaching, advocacy and other activities, Jesuit institutions of higher learning are already doing much to promote peace and reconciliation in a divided world. Yet the needs in our current global climate require a renewed and deeper commitment to this mission, rooted in the Ignatian *magis* and lived out with great creativity and generosity. It is hoped the meeting at Bilbao will enable us to share best practices in this area, helping us learn from one another and mapping out possible forms of future collaboration.

- 1) **Mapping:** Participants at the Bilbao conference are invited to reflect and share on two basic questions:
 - a) What are the *most significant* needs of reconciliation in your context?
 - b) What is your institution doing *to respond specifically* to these needs?On the basis of this reflection and discussion, participants can begin to compile a map or inventory of current practices, some of which might have elements that have a potential application to other contexts.

- 2) **Research:** Through our research activities, Jesuit institutions of higher learning play a significant role in promoting depth of understanding

regarding the origin, history and current dynamics of situations of hostility, division and conflict. For their part, peace institutes address such contexts directly, seeking to understand current realities with a view to proposing constructive paths to peace and reconciliation. Through their creative and innovative research, such organizations provide a depth of analysis – as well as links to the wider community – that can help promote peace and reconciliation. In which fields is your institution doing research on peace and reconciliation? Could Jesuit peace institutes be connected with each other in a more direct and meaningful way?

- 3) **Teaching:** Through our curriculum and pedagogy, Jesuit educational institutions have a major impact on the lives of students and, through them, on the wider community. In our courses, how do we approach the realities of division, alienation and hostility between groups in our context? How do we help our students understand these realities with the depth and competence required to envisage new ways of fostering right relationships? To what extent is exposure to other perspectives and worldviews an intrinsic part of our curriculum and pedagogy? Are immersion experiences helpful in this regard?
- 4) **Experiential Learning:** In many of our institutions, students have the possibility (or requirement) of service learning within the wider community. How do such experiences – and the reflection upon these – enable them to become agents of peace and reconciliation? Through local, national and global networks, are there ways of linking Jesuit works to enhance such opportunities for our students? Might there be ways of including faculty and staff in such experiences?
- 5) **Formation:** Due to our common Jesuit mission of formation of the whole person – intellectually, socially and spiritually – how do we form students and other members of our community to be reconciling leaders in a fragmented world? What are the ways in which they learn the concrete skills of attentive listening, respectful communication, communal discernment and collaborative action to live out this vocation?
- 6) **Advocacy:** By bringing together diverse social groups, Jesuit institutions of higher learning play an important role in advocating for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable. What are the specific ways in which your institution represents and empowers those who have been adversely affected by social tension, alienation and division? Are such efforts able to foster

peace and reconciliation by restoring right relations with the perpetrators of such injustice, leading to personal, communal and institutional conversion?

- 7) **Convening:** Many Jesuit institutions operate in contexts of recent or continuing social conflict and unrest. In certain cases, academic leaders within these organizations have been able to convene representatives of parties that had been estranged. What role can Jesuit institutions of higher learning play in this more active approach to promoting peace and reconciliation? What are the risks inherent in such initiatives and how might Jesuit institutions learn from each other in this regard? How have such efforts addressed the important issues of accountability and reparation?
- 8) **Reconciling and Reconciled Institutions:** As we live out our ministry of reconciliation, how do we promote reconciliation *within* our educational institutions? Where is the need for peace and reconciliation within our institutions and what are we doing to promote greater understanding, dialogue and harmony in this respect? How have we responded to the legacy of colonialism in our past – and to the present reality of political and ideological polarization? To what extent have our uses of technology helped or rather hindered us in these efforts? How do our institutions respond to the reality of diversity within and beyond our university communities?
- 9) **Institutional Examen:** As Jesuit institutions of higher education, how do we encourage reflection on our efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in our context? How can we effectively involve our academic community in reflecting on this mission, discerning consolations and desolations as well as possible ways forward? How might this occur within the context of communal apostolic discernment, involving both Jesuits and lay collaborators? Are Jesuit colleges, universities and peace institutes able and willing to develop an “institutional examen” that would help them become more intentional and fruitful in this ministry? Could such an examen be part of a larger strategic plan for our institutions? If so, how might progress in this area be measured and evaluated?

Conclusion

Within a fragmented and divided world, Jesuit institutions of higher education are called to deepen an already significant role in promoting peace and reconciliation. In the spirit of GC36, we live out a mission of reconciliation with God, with others

and with creation by educating and forming “reconciling leaders”. Called to witness to the wider community, we aspire to be reconciling and reconciled institutions, moved by a common commitment to personal, social and institutional conversion that is rooted in the Spiritual Exercises.

In this call to transformation, we collaborate with other agents for social change to address the sins of past division and hostility through the promotion of dialogue, understanding and solidarity. As discerning communities of disciples, Jesuit educational institutions address the need for peace and reconciliation in specific contexts, applying an Ignatian depth of analysis, depth of understanding and depth of commitment to foster right relationships. Doing this through local, national and global networks, we offer a meaningful contribution to the wider Church and humanity in ways that are grounded in our unique Ignatian charism and spirituality.

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