

The History of the *Justice in Jesuit Higher Education* Conference

In October 2000, Santa Clara University hosted a conference to mark the 25th anniversary of [Decree Four of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus](#), ‘Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice.’ This landmark decree re-oriented all Jesuit institutions – universities, high schools, parishes, social ministries, etc. – toward the inextricable linking of faith-and-justice as a constituent identifier of any work calling itself Jesuit. Coming on the heels of Superior General Pedro Arrupe, S.J.’s famous 1973 [“Men for Others” speech](#) (“Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ - for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce.” – Arrupe), Decree Four ignited a firestorm of energy, controversy and renewal in the Society of Jesus and its ministries during subsequent decades.

The *Justice 2000: Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education* conference at Santa Clara provided a needed opportunity for in-depth discussion among leaders at all 28 Jesuit higher ed. institutions, to reflect on the meaning of Decree Four’s first 25 years in the lives of their institutions, and to chart a path forward. The late President of Santa Clara, Paul Locatelli, S.J. led the effort, assisted by the late Bill Spohn, Director of Santa Clara’s [Bannan Center](#). AJCU Presidents nominated more than 400 delegates, who attended the event after taking part in preparatory, regional meetings. Superior-General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. delivered the keynote address titled, “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education.” It remains a benchmark of Jesuit identity for our schools. The [text and video of the speech are available here](#).

Not surprisingly, energy among the conference participants was high, following the *Justice 2000* conference, and discussion about how to maintain momentum ensued. AJCU did not actively plan future meetings or provide central office personnel for them, but a group of academic colleagues formed a national steering committee (now a professional conference of AJCU) and convened independently to discuss next steps. What eventuated was a regular gathering – roughly triennial – called [Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education](#). Any colleague in Jesuit higher education could attend the conference, which consisted of plenary addresses and workshops on various justice themes.

Throughout these years, a rotating group of faculty and administrators shouldered the responsibility of organizing the conference, which took place at a range of Jesuit universities including; Santa Clara University (2000), Loyola University Chicago (2003), John Carroll University (2005), Fairfield University (2009), Creighton University (2013), Seattle University (2017), and most recently Georgetown University (2020) via Zoom as a consequence of the Covid-19 epidemic. They are to be lauded for these efforts.