

## **Citizenship and Democracy: Exercising Individual Freedom Toward the Common Good**

Scholars from a variety of disciplines—e.g., political science, sociology, philosophy, theology, law, psychology—and other civic and religious leaders have raised concerns that democracy and democratic principles are less understood and appreciated by young people today. Throughout the globe, on each continent including our own, the rise of populist leaders, the increasing polarization in our politics, and the attack on a shared sense of reality, or post-truth, have led many to fear we are headed in a dangerous direction. In his address to members of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (who gathered for an Assembly at Boston College in Summer 2022), Rev. Arturo Sosa, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus, reminded those assembled that “A characteristic identity of Jesuit universities is to find... meaning in our public life...to better understand how to contribute to the deepening of the expansion of democracy which is threatened today even in those countries in which democracy has a long tradition, and one would suppose a deeply rooted consciousness of democratic values as the basis of political stability.” (See [Sosa Address](#) to IAJU, 2022, p.3)

Sosa and others have pointed to the need for education for citizenship—national and global—and the “fundamental role that the Humanities play in a Jesuit education that leads to integral human development and a commitment to the common good.” In a time of increasing threat from “three strains of virus” including “fragmentation, superficiality, and instrumentality,” we must ask ourselves: what does it mean to be a global citizen participating in a powerful democracy, especially during a time of great polarization and tension?

This commission is asked to reflect on the forces that threaten our commitment to the discovery of truth; the increasing polarization that threatens civil discourse and communal discernment for the common good; and how these might be addressed in educational programs for our students. For example, does the core curriculum at our Jesuit colleges and universities adequately address the challenges to truth, to concern for the common good, and respect for democratic institutions that call for inclusion and equity for all in our society? Are students prepared to understand the forces that threaten democracy? Are they being prepared to participate in our civic community as leaders with an ethical compass, and a firm belief in the dignity of all people, including and especially those on the margins of society? Are they aware of their call to global citizenship with its responsibilities for the welfare of all humanity, and the natural world which is our common home? *How, then, can a Jesuit, liberal education better prepare young people to become a force for expanding participation in our democracy, for discerning truth in our political discourse, and for working for the inclusion of all in the benefits of a liberal democracy?*

## **The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm: Responding to Students and Their Hungers**

This Commission will explore how to articulate, leverage, and promote an Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) for widespread use across the AJCU network. We expect this work will consist of three different elements:

1. Cataloging IPP efforts already in place at member institutions and making a centralized website for this information (with assumptions/metrics for inclusion criteria);
2. Synthesizing what a twenty-first century IPP might look like and already looks like through a white paper, possibly using the following questions / prompts: What is an Ignatian classroom, student and teacher; why (anecdotally and factually) do faculty and others use IPP; and how do they ensure that the faith foundation is present (spiritual roots in a pluralistic setting);
3. At a minimum, an outline and working timeline, with a plan for completing an online IPP certification course that follows the IPP model to be endorsed by AJCU and made available to all member institutions.

### **Justice and Reconciliation: Addressing the History of Slavery and Oppression by Jesuit Institutions**

The mission of reconciliation and justice begins with an examination of our institutional legacy as AJCU institutions, and extends outward, reflecting our broader shared commitment to racial justice. Education has been the primary intellectual apostolate for the Society of Jesus, and a key apostolate for the Church. The second Universal Apostolic Preference, *Walking with the Excluded*, calls us to walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice.

How do we engage our theological tradition and other mechanisms to help us face the communal guilt and responsibility for how the Church and Jesuit educational institutions have participated in the systematic oppression of others, perpetuated over time and across places, especially through slavery? What do theological terms (e.g., confession, lamentation, reparation, forgiveness and reconciliation) mean in the context of historical traumas and ongoing oppression, especially (but not exclusively) those perpetuated upon those from historically marginalized backgrounds? What do the spiritual traditions of those who have been oppressed have to say to our own Ignatian tradition? *In short, what responsibility do our institutions bear toward assisting in this healing and reconciliation process and how might they undertake this mission?*

## ***Laudato Sí: Advancing a Shared Agenda for Our Common Home***

Countering today's global climate and ecological crisis is a supreme challenge of our time. Piece-meal, short-term responses are not enough. As Pope Francis highlights in his encyclical, *Laudato Sí*, more of us must hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. As part of a response, all people of goodwill are further called upon to engage in an 'ecological conversion' to truly grasp nature's intricacies and intrinsic value; the links between social justice, environmental justice and spirituality; and the consequent responsibilities we have to Earth and each other. These are features of an integral ecology, the *Laudato Sí*-recommended, comprehensive orientation we need to heal our common home.

Colleges and universities are privileged locations for teaching and exemplifying integral ecology. This privilege is especially true of institutions founded by the Society of Jesus and inspired by the fourth Universal Apostolic Preference: 'Caring for our Common Home: Collaborate, with Gospel Depth, for the Protection and Renewal of God's Creation.' Knowing the urgent cry of the Earth and its poor, inspired by Pope Francis' vision of an integral ecology, and assigned by the Society of Jesus and Pope Francis to be in solidarity with all creation, how can we make integral ecology a hallmark of our Jesuit colleges and universities in their operations, academic affairs, community formation, and civic engagement?

The purpose of the *Laudato Sí* Commission is to show "how Jesuit colleges and universities can respond to some of our society's deepest concerns" and "propose specific steps for that response." In the months leading up to the 2024 Assembly, the *Laudato Sí* Commission will work through and winnow submitted ideas until arriving at a set of transformative, actionable recommendations for making integral ecology a hallmark of our Jesuit colleges and universities.

## ***Prison Education: A Call to Conversion in Our Shared Humanity***

College credit classes in prisons, through the Jesuit enterprise of higher education, is an expression of the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is a means of companionship and conversion to humanity: for the students in prison and the students on our campuses; for the faculty providing the instruction; for the staff of the correctional facilities who are taking courses; for the leadership of the institutions involved; and, by extension, for the institutions themselves.

All works of the Society of Jesus are rooted in the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. One element of these Exercises is the consideration of our shared humanity by mediating upon Christ's humanity and suffering. A constant refrain heard from the participants in prison education is "feeling human, again."

The focus of the upcoming AJCU Assembly is "reconciliation and justice." Reconciliation is the effort to end estrangement; justice is about the pursuit of a right relationship with the Divine, all of humanity, and the created world. A portion of

the Assembly will focus on how Jesuit Prison Education Network (JPEN) participants reflect upon, help restore and promote our shared humanity.

In Spring 2024, prior to, and in preparation for, the Assembly, JPEN will publish *The Case for Jesuit Prison Education*. It will consist of two dozen (24) essays on prison education.

Outcomes:

1. Members of JPEN will share with Assembly participants the models of prison education as expressions of reconciliation and justice. These expressions of “shared humanity” will reflect experience and “best practices” for the delivery of college class instruction. These will include lessons learned; budgeting; and ways of seeking support to sustain the effort.
2. JPEN will seek the endorsement of the Assembly, through a proposal to be sent to AJCU leadership and governance, for prison education to become a constitutive and embedded priority for each of its member institutions.

### **Student Spiritual Growth & Mental Health: Toward a Hope-filled Future**

Educating the “whole person” requires an awareness of and sensitivity to the challenges facing our students. Students are juggling busy schedules, managing financial challenges (including educational debt), and keeping up with their academic studies as they seek to live into a future marked by uncertainty and anxieties around global and national challenges. Such challenges pose existential threats to a hope-filled future, and include climate change, loss of biodiversity, migration and displacement, racism, war, gun and sexual violence, as well as threats to thriving for many different populations.

In many evident and real ways, this generation of students is challenged to make their way in a society with a limited or no sense of real safety for themselves individually, nor from governmental, societal or religious institutions. Still, students desire lives of meaning, filled with a sense of connection, belonging, and hope. Increasingly, however, they present as anxious and insecure—as unsure. They look to colleges and universities for assistance in their quest to find meaning and purpose for their lives, beyond merely embarking on a successful career path.

The third Universal Apostolic Preference, *Journeying with Youth: Accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future*, invites our institutions to address these realities. *How can the Ignatian tradition help equip them with the skills, values, and experiences needed to move with others toward a hope-filled future?* How do we offer opportunities to meet the social, psychological, and spiritual needs that students bring to their college experience, especially among those who are most vulnerable? Are there best practices and innovative programs that can be shared among our institutions? Are there opportunities for collective action?