

JESUITS-LAY APOSTOLIC PARTNERS: CONTINUING CHALLENGES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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We have been blessed with abundant grace in the apostolic partnership between Jesuits and laity in official Jesuit ministries as well as in the involvement of Jesuits in social movements and other groups like non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This grace is reflected in both the extent and depth of this partnership.

With a total of 240 Jesuits and a median age of 60 years old, the ministries of the Philippine Province include (a) five universities and three basic education schools, (b) theological faculties, (c) social development work for research, advocacy and organizing, (d) centers for Ignatian spirituality and psychospiritual formation as well as retreat houses, (e) media production and education, and (f) parishes. These diverse and extensive ministries would not have been possible without the overwhelming number of laity who take active part in various capacities.

Moreover, competent and committed laity have taken leadership roles and critical positions in many of these ministries. For more than 25 years, the formation of Jesuits from novitiate onward has involved lay people not only as lecturers but as counsellors and spiritual directors. During province meetings of superiors and directors of work then, it is not unusual to meet lay women as the executive directors of the Institute for Church and Social Issues and the Center for Ignatian Spirituality.

This same extent and depth are found in social movements and groups in which Jesuits are engaged within a wider network including alumni, benefactors and friends. For instance, Jesuits have worked side by side with—not in leading roles over—civil society advocates in the overthrow of two authoritarian and corrupt presidents of the Philippines. Individual Jesuits work with lay people in groups ranging from grassroots organizations to environmental NGOs.

As in many places throughout the world, this rich experience of apostolic partnership between Jesuits and lay in the Philippines has been the direct consequence of the Second Vatican Council and recent General Congregations of the Society. Familiar documents from both these sources recognize the equal dignity of the laity as baptized, their own call to mission, and the role of their ministries within the Church and in the world. Thus they have been truly identified as apostolic partners, not just employees or, worse, “glorified sacristans”.

Within this graced experience engendered by the fundamental shift within the Church and the Society some forty years ago, this brief essay focuses on two general challenges in apostolic partnership which are relevant to other contexts as well but are now especially addressed by the Philippine Province.

Nurturing an Ethos of Apostolic Partnership through Mutual Formation

Like other cultural contexts where Catholicism has had a long historical presence and defining influence, traditional Philippine society may be generally characterized as having an undue regard for priests and religious. Though not oblivious of personal characteristics of individual priests and religious, this cultural context regards them positively by sheer virtue of status due in part to traditional pre-Vatican II theologies of the ordained and religious status as “higher” than those of marriage, and in part to patriarchal attitudes regarding the lower status of women. Thus priests and religious, especially male, are normally given places of honor in social and even political functions. Apathy and anticlericalism in different guises undoubtedly exist among some as a result of earlier historical

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attitudes regarding the church's involvement with the status quo or of contemporary perceptions of the church as a threat to their power. Nevertheless, respect for priests and religious continues to be part of the local cultural landscape.

Closely linked to this characteristic is the cultural behavior of many priests and religious which may be described as paternalistic. They tend to treat others with what they understand to be "kind and charitable", even "the pastoral approach", but in effect, their actions suggest that they do not see the lay as "mature" or "equal".

These cultural realities in the Philippine context affect the practice of apostolic partnership between Jesuit and lay. For instance, they are often reinforced among those within the ambit of Jesuit presence and influence. Jesuits are generally sought as "more intelligent lecturers", "better retreat directors" or "more liberal confessors". As with anything cultural, these realities are for the most part implicit in behavior and unconscious on the part of many, but they can hinder the manner of apostolic partnership envisioned by the contemporary Society.

For instance, in situations when competent and committed lay persons are appointed to leadership positions, one hears comments—often not meant to out down any person concerned—that "it would have been better if it had been a Jesuit". In calling attention to comments like this, one need not deny nor disregard the differences between Jesuits and lay in many aspects, both as groups and individuals. But at the same time, the fundamental norm in this situation within which these differences could be taken into account should be who could serve the mission of the particular apostolic work better.

Another example of how this clerical cultural characteristic could undermine genuine apostolic partnership may be found in situations especially within Jesuit institutions when a Jesuit works under the jurisdiction of a lay administrator. Because of this cultural factor, it becomes more difficult for the lay person to deal with the particular Jesuit with the same professional standards applied to all. Even if one prescind from the attitude of the Jesuit involved, important issues related with professional evaluation or retirement become sensitive. This becomes more difficult if there are other dimensions to their relationship like being mentor-student before or if the Jesuit is much older.

As Decree 13 of GC 34 insisted, such instances can only be overcome by nurturing an ethos of apostolic partnership through formation of both

Jesuits and their partners. The Philippine Province and its diverse apostolic works have undertaken programs to address this need. Schools have conducted Ignatian Spirituality in Education Workshops (ISEW) for Jesuit and lay administrators, faculty and staff. There have also been efforts in the social apostolate to introduce lay partners to Ignatian spirituality.

But even more basic than these formation programs is the importance of the informal dialogue of life between Jesuits and lay. The success stories of Jesuit-lay apostolic partnership have often been initiated and/or supported by friendship and cordial relationships between them. As in many cultural changes, these begin not in formal structures but in ordinary everyday interactions. Jesuits and lay people have other important concerns, but “wasting some time” with each other is crucial in this regard.

It is in the light of these ongoing programs that the following comments about formation in apostolic partnership are made. First, it is important that part of this formation be undertaken within a mixed group of Jesuit and lay from different ministries. Such a diversity helps in emphasizing their common mission, one which their particular ministry or institution is based on, as well as in widening and enriching their own vision and experience. Then subsequent formation programs can be held to discuss issues of Jesuit-lay apostolic partnership peculiar to particular ministries or institutions.

Second, it is equally important to have opportunities in which Jesuits and lay share and reflect on their apostolic partnership together. They learn to listen to each other’s experience and to discuss critical areas in their partnership. While it is also necessary to have other occasions for both groups to discuss on their own, this mutual sharing and discussion is essential for genuine apostolic partnership.

Third, formation in apostolic partnership in its many dimensions must take into account the different needs of both. For example, Jesuits may need to locate this partnership within their theologies of the Church, ordained ministry and religious life. For those who have been accustomed to situations when all leadership were in Jesuit hands, this has also to be accompanied by spiritual growth in the spirit of kenosis. Those in initial formation who have been exposed to the laity in their formation still need to explicate their experience of working with and under lay supervision especially during regency.

On the part of lay partners, formation must include knowledge of the foundations of Christian faith as well as familiarity with Ignatian

spirituality. A recent survey of faculty and staff in some Jesuit universities in the Philippines, though not comprehensive, pointed to their insufficient knowledge about their own faith. Though different programs on Ignatian spirituality including retreats have been offered to many lay partners, there is the need to thematize this spirituality in the light of the experience, personal and professional, of lay people, single and married. A married lay man deeply involved in Christian Life Communities said that he has been looking for more literature about Ignatian spirituality by lay people and for lay people.

***Creating Synergy between Management Practices
and Jesuit Governance***

Apostolic partnership between Jesuit and lay has been affected by innovations in Jesuit apostolic works where they work hand in hand. Like other church institutions, these have recently appropriated contemporary management practices. Whether they are universities or small centers, many have undergone vision-mission setting, strategic planning and organizational development. These practices have been used for and rightly incorporated into the management of our Jesuit institutions in the service of both administrative efficiency and apostolic effectivity.

At the same time, these Jesuit institutions follow ways of proceeding that are typically Jesuit. Some examples of these are the practice of discernment and the importance of *cura personalis* in Jesuit governance. In the light of the current management practice, some of these have been modified and others kept for good reason. But there remains the question how these two management practices and Jesuit governance relate operationally. One should not expect complete integration as these two evolved in different contexts and therefore have different finalities. On the other hand, they should not operate in Jesuit apostolic works independent of, much less at odds with, each other; hence the importance of synergy between them.

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This current state of affairs is where the apostolic partnership between Jesuits and lay plays itself out. Therefore attention must be given to specific areas which could be obstacles to genuine partnership. For example, one could ask to what extent Jesuit institutions incorporate discernment as an explicit approach to corporate decision-making rather than simply cost-benefit analysis.

But another instance far more critical has to do with the place of the annual visitation of and the individual Jesuit's account of conscience with the Jesuit major superior. These play a fundamental religious role in Jesuit governance. In situations then, when lay persons take top leadership roles in a Jesuit ministry, there must be more than occasional communications between the Jesuit major superior and these lay leaders. Without inappropriately imposing Jesuit practices, this relationship between the major superior and these lay leaders must be characterized by mutual openness and transparency. Only then can there be a co-responsibility that truly works for the establishment of God's Reign and makes all equal servants of Christ's mission.

The Philippine Province continues to take significant steps in meeting these two general challenges today, hoping that Jesuits and lay people will become more deeply *magkabalikat* ["shoulder-to-shoulder"] in mission. Blessed as it has been with extensive and profound experiences of Jesuit-lay apostolic partnership, it looks to the General Congregation 35 for an even more definitive affirmation of this apostolic partnership.