

Companions on Mission

by Alice Poltorick and Peter Feuerherd

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Last October, at the Companions on Mission retreat, lay and Jesuit colleagues of the New England, Maryland, and New York Provinces gathered to share stories of faith and mission and prayerfully discern where Christ is calling them as apostolic partners in Ignatian ministries.

The *Companions on Mission* gathering was sponsored by the Colleagues of the Maryland Province (COMP), a voluntary association of 25 Ignatian inspired lay men and women working in the apostolates of the Maryland Province and by the Jesuit Collaborative, an association of Jesuits, laypersons, clergy and religious who share in common the spiritual tradition of St. Ignatius Loyola in the three Jesuit provinces on the eastern seaboard.

Prior to and during the gathering, participants prayed and reflected on three documents from the 35th General Congregation: Decree 2—*A Fire that Kindles Other Fires*, focusing on identity and being rooted in relationship with Jesus; Decree 3—*Challenges to Our Mission Today*, highlighting the need for adapting to the changing face of our world with new frontiers; and Decree 6—*Collaboration at the Heart of Mission*, reflecting on the gifts and graces received through work in and with the Society of Jesus.



Fr. Ron Mercier, SJ

A Fire that Kindles Other Fires

As the group sat in quiet darkness in the chapel on Wednesday evening, *Christ, our Light*, emerged in song as the cornerstone for the opening session. On Thursday, presentations from Fr. Ron Mercier, SJ, director of the Jesuit Collaborative and Fr. Michael Boughton, SJ, director of the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Boston



Companions on Mission Committee members from the Maryland, New England and New York Provinces: l-r, Jeff Seymour, Marie Bannister, Ed Quinnan, SJ, Jackie Perez, Vin DeCola, SJ, Clare Walsh, MHSH, Tony Moore, Meg Florentine, Kevin O'Brien, Carol Corgan



Fr. Michael Boughton, SJ

College, focused on setting the context with reflections on their experience as participants at the General Congregation in Rome.

Challenges to Our Mission Today

Fr. Boughton highlighted the international flavor and youth of the Society of Jesus in the world. In India, and in much of Africa, more than half of the Jesuits are young men in the process of formation. In Latin America, the concern is that its public commitment to the poor has come at great cost, including martyrdom. Despite cultural differences, Jesuits around the world share a common language focused on Ignatian spirituality with its Christ-centered emphasis.

Jesuits have also benefited from the Society's leadership, said Fr. Boughton. Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, the newly elected General of the Society, has roots in Catholic Spain, with an education in Rome, and long years of service in Asia. By virtue of that experience, he retains an appreciation of the diversity of the modern world and how best to reach it with the Gospel.

Collaboration at the Heart of Mission

Fr. Mercier addressed the theme of collaboration, noting that the documents of the General Congregation

The center of our collaboration is prayer. Collaboration as a way of being, leading to community and communion across ministries, in order to be more effectively with Christ on mission.



affirmed that the Society working with lay people in its ministries is “not a strategy for effectiveness” in response to a diminished number of Jesuits in North America and Europe but is, rather, “a vital part of our way of proceeding. We see it as a blessing,” he emphasized.

That afternoon, two lay colleagues, Dr. Jacqueline Perez and Ms. Carol O’Neil, shared their personal experience of Ignatian discernment with the conference. At the closing of the gathering, participants were particularly grateful for new and renewed relationships with colleagues across the various apostolic works and ministries, and for a revitalized sense of shared mission and heightened energy around, and future vision for, lay/Jesuit collaboration.

Alice Poltorick is director of communications for the New England Province. Peter Feuerherd is communications consultant for the New York Province.

Graces of Being Companions on Mission

On Thursday, participants spent time during prayer and conversation, identifying the graces of the time spent together. On Friday, the group proclaimed the graces and a communal response and commitment during the closing prayer.

- Partnership is the growing reality—not merely a strategy
- Collaboration is a way of being
- Community and communion across ministries as mission
- Joy in the face of darkness
- Centrality of Jesus and the *Spiritual Exercises*
- Documents of GC35 as context, not conclusion
- Invitation/longing to go deeper communally and individually
- Gratitude for a better understanding of foundational graces that bond us in mission
- Discernment as a way of proceeding



Ignatian Leadership for Mission (ILM) Retreat

The Ignatian Leadership for Mission retreat is designed as a communal experience of Ignatian companionship in mission. Since 2005, almost 200 Jesuit and lay colleagues have participated in ILM retreats and discerned “Where is the Lord leading us as lay/Jesuit companions on mission?” **The next five-day silent retreat will be held at the**

Campion Retreat Center in Weston, Massachusetts, on June 21–26, 2009.



For more information, visit www.jesuit-collaborative.org