

Fostering Community and Belonging

Conveners: Eric Berrelleza, SJ; Will Rutt

of Meetings: 3 full committee meetings, 1 drafting committee meeting

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The works of the province minister in a context of brokenness, division and alienation, characterized by social and political polarization, economic disparity, social exclusion and distrust of and estrangement from the Church and other institutions. The ministry of healing and reconciliation is experienced as central to these works, thereby creating communities of belonging, inclusion, mutual ownership, purpose, joy and hope where each individual is cared for, valued, and treated with dignity.

The focus of the ministry of community and belonging is both internal, as it fosters the growth of community among its members, and external, as it confronts injustice, promotes human dignity, and works for peace and reconciliation beyond its walls, while inviting and welcoming others share in the life of the community.

Narrative:

We are living in a period of profound change, uncertainty, and complexity. These times are as interesting and exciting as they are stressful and frightening. Catholic Theologian Fr. Bryan Massingale, in an address to the Christian Brothers Conference in Rome in the Spring of 2022, eloquently summarized what we are living through:

Ecological crises; upheavals in sexuality; ethnic conflicts and nationalist resentments; the displacement of war and the terror of disease: these pivotal signs of the time reveal something indisputable when we consider them in the aggregate. We are living in a **change of era, a new time, a new age**, that does not yet have a name or know how to name itself. Ours is an **age of anxiety and fragility**. A fragility experienced personally, interpersonally, socially, and culturally. An anxiety over actual and impending currents of momentous change and the fear that reality – that we – can never again be the same.

Given the context of the world today, ***why would anyone choose to be a part of a Jesuit work or institution?***

To answer this poignant question, our province is called to be a sign of courageous hope. To accomplish this goal we must not only reflect on our Jesuit Mission and Ignatian Spirituality, but to center God's unconditional love when we speak and act. Understanding that there are forces that want to pull us apart, we must be steadfast in cultivating healing, focusing on kinship, and reveling in the mutuality of our existence with one another.

In thinking about what may foster community and belonging within our works of the province or a Jesuit community, we begin by recalling the opposite poles that enable brokenness, division, and alienation. The habits that form the communities we wish to experience ought to touch a space for regularity marked by consistency and humility in the form of unpretentiousness and amity that allows reconciliation and warmth. An ideal community is a place that encourages healing and the long process needed to heal. A community is a space where joy is experienced

regularly, not once in a blue moon. It allows an individual to grow in service to their neighbor. An ideal community allows for differences of opinion, even when that opinion is viewed as wrong, so long as there is no desire to harm another person.

A mission-informed practice would seek to eliminate inequities, practice and foster radical empathy and promote humanity through a focused healing process to be recognized as communities of authentic belonging. By eliminating inequities in all their forms, we create opportunity and agency for all members of our institutions. We also eradicate some of the most significant impediments to the idea of community, such as individualism, distrust, skepticism, and fear. We create space to imagine new ways of living and create solutions to complex and nuanced problems. As people formed by Ignatian Spirituality, we don't subscribe to the notion that we need to learn to care or be trained to empathize with one another; we are wired to care. It's already in us. Our work is to consistently create the right conditions and opportunities to practice and exercise this muscle. We need to make space for it in our daily and work lives.

Another crucial aspect of this work is fixing harms and repairing wounds inflicted by institutional indifference. We can accomplish this by illuminating our humanness by encouraging us to reflect on our fears, to recognize our vulnerabilities, to practice empathy and engage in regular self reflection. Lastly, we hope to arrive at a place in our communities and institutions in which belonging, the capacity to see the humanity in those that are not like us and to recognize that the same elements that exist within them also exist within us, is a palpable element of our ethos. This will allow us to deconstruct the myth of "us versus them" and bask in the glory of the beloved community.

Possibilities:

Among Apostolates and Jesuit Communities

1. Actively working to cultivate belonging and inclusion through transforming structures and experiences of exclusion through personal and institutional accountability, the correction of policies and practices that marginalize, both internally and externally.

- Inspired by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) aim to cultivate: Listening & Learning, Educating Ourselves, Continuous Engagement, Reviewing, Reflecting and Revising, Transparency and Accountability.
- Leverage each of the sector's expertise and knowledge to develop spiritual practice and theological guidance to connect Ignatian Spirituality, Catholic Social Teaching, and practices of inclusion.
- Actively practicing and forming the community in counter cultural practice through creating:
 - A Culture of Rest and Care vs. Grind/Hustle Culture
 - Transformational relationships vs. Transactional relationships

2. Establish a cabinet level position or devoted leadership body and budget to fostering community and belonging through serving as an:

- Animate *Our Way of Proceeding: Domain 5* (Secondary Schools) by acting as a thought partner schools as they discern their programming and culture
- Provide coaching, support, and assistance to apostolates to identify strengths, areas of growth, and limitations

- Develop a Community and Belonging Assessment Tool that customizable by sector and inherently Ignatian
- Commission an extensive ethnographic study of the province and apostolates
- Coordinate ongoing training for Jesuits, Directors of Work, local superiors, faculty, and staff at apostolates
- Provincial wide gatherings, networking opportunities, and retreats to support the growth and deepening of community and belonging
- Center communities with the greatest needs who may lack the economic resources at their institutions to hire someone dedicated to the work of inclusion

Note: We believe that it is important to name that the person/people overseeing this work need to be compensated for their time. Although there are many animated and willing people throughout the province who want to help with initiatives around community and belonging, real change happens when we choose to invest in initiatives that are deemed critical.

3. Clarify how community and belonging is integral to the mission and identity of the province.

- Define the work of inclusion and belonging as inherently Ignatian in value
- Provide direct support, leadership, and guidance, especially as it relates to including communities that have been marginalized by the institutional Church.
- Re-define and reaffirm invitation to co-responsibility between provincial, superiors, and directors of works to the work of inclusion.
- Hold communities and apostolates accountable to fostering community and belonging.
- Develop a similar reflective tool to *Our Way of Proceeding: Domain 5* (Secondary Schools) to be used by each of the apostolate sectors and incorporated into each respective sponsorship process

4. Responding to the tension between the broader Church and the Society, utilize the practice of communal discernment as a model for synodality by integrating the practice more readily into all apostolic works through regular listening spaces, structures, and tools, all focused on a commitment to become more deeply grounded in relationality.

- Reflect on the absent and marginalized voices and consider ways to foster their inclusion.
- Accountability for all apostolates of regularly listening and soliciting input from diverse voices.
- Integrate the practice of communal discernment into provincial/regional gatherings.
- Foster a culture of discernment for apostolates to consider their continued affiliation with the province.

Within Jesuit Communities

5. Address the low morale of Jesuits across the province through deep, deliberative, and continued listening before change is made.

- Ongoing professional development for superiors as well as reduction in their responsibilities in order to better care for the men in each of their respective communities.
- Recenter *cura personalis* in the work of a Provincial as they seek to build a healthy and collaborative Jesuit community who can then better serve the communities they are a part of.
- Recenter *cura personalis* in the work of each superior with particular consideration for their particular ministerial responsibilities.
- Listen, acknowledge, and work to heal the pain, struggles, and low morale of the current community in a slow and deliberate fashion

- Coordinate a GAP Analysis for the province to analyze its current state and identify areas of growth and outline a clear strategy for missioning men.
- Identify the most optimal model/structure of each Jesuit community based on local context and needs of the men in each community.

People and Resources:

Overall, a significant investment of resources and infrastructure is needed in the area of building community and belonging. As noted above, many of the individuals who currently lead this work do so with little to no compensation and limited institutional support and capacity.

Re-Imagining Apostolic Operations & Collaborations: many apostolates compete for donors, support, and limited resources. The province could offer significant support to collaboratively fundraise and equitably distribute funds based on need and proximity to the youth and marginalized. In addition below are listed primary concerns and critical considerations regarding community and belonging and financial implications:

- Increase financial accessibility to Jesuit universities
- Address funding and resources disparities between legacy schools, nativity schools, and Cristo Rey Schools.
- Assess the particular economic experience of community members on the margins (students of high financial need, support staff, etc.) and center their well-being and dignity.

Collaborative Grants: Similar to CORE grants, the province should consider making funds available for collaborative grants to fund inter-apostolate work focused on fostering community and belonging.

Collaboration:

Cross Sectoral - each sector offers a particular gift to this work and shares a co-responsibility. Leveraging the expertise, resources, of the respective apostolates.

- *Spiritual Ministries* - develop prayers, retreats, and spiritual movements
- *Universities* - provide ministerial formation to lay and religious leaders, conduct research to inform practice and pedagogy to identify structural pathways for change.
- *Secondary Education* - cultivate and empower youth voices, provide pathways for marginalized communities to access resources
- *Social Ministries* - identify and mobilize pathways for structural change
- *Parishes* - centers for cross-sectoral/communal sharing, community organizing, and social justice faith formation

Inter Sectoral- create collaborative spaces to share best practices, resources, and build collective vision particularly through shared initiatives and consistent physical gatherings.

Regional - consider ways to facilitate and incentivize apostolic works to develop programming, train staff, and create initiatives together as regional bodies.

External - many communities and organizations have built successful and compelling models for much of the work outlined in the opportunities section. Utilizing already well developed tools, models, and resources developed by outside of the immediate Jesuit network should be considered as robust opportunities for partnership and growth.

Challenges, Obstacles and Pitfalls:

Culture of Marginalization - much of the listening conducted throughout the apostolic process has identified burnout, mental health crises, and lack of imaginative/generative thinking. These are all manifestations of marginalization, a culture that glorifies busyness and achievement whereas rest, reflection, and community building should be at the heart of our institutions. This takes particular shape within Jesuit apostolates through a co-opting of *magis*, a professed commitment to excellence and rigor, *cura apostolica* over *cura personalis*, self-sacrificing mission savior mentality and the prescribed narrow definitions and measures of success, particularly in the our educational institutions.

Mission Integration: community and belonging is not largely understood as constitutive to the mission and identity of the Society of Jesus. This manifests itself in many ways, but notably in pushback within apostolates through a labeling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and political action for social changes as secular.

Lack of Funding and Infrastructure - currently there is a significant lack of funding to support this work. Many individuals championing/leading this work do so with little institutional support outside of their job description and responsibilities. Moving forward, this work cannot rely on the unpaid work of BIPOC people as they foster and lead change in their own communities.

Resistance to Change: tradition is a powerful force within communities and is many times the most significant barrier to progress. While tradition is foundational to continuing the mission of the Society of Jesus and openness to a lived tradition that responds to the signs of the times must be cultivated.

Performative Behavior vs. Substantive Change: many apostolates have changed language, created new titles, and worked significantly to increase representation within their communities. These changes have not led to transformation of policy, structure of communities, or sufficient power sharing, but are often touted as sufficient. Substantive change must include access for all and equitable systems in an effort to form communities of belonging.

Apostolic Models:

Discernment of Relationship: a process, marked by freedom and guided by Ignatian spirituality, for each institution to identify and define their desired relationship with the province, with clear mutually agreed upon parameters and expectations for both the province and the apostolate.

Advisory Committees: as an accountability and support structure develop advisory committees in each sector and cross sectorally for cultivating community and belonging.

Lay Associate Model: similar to that of many women's religious congregations, a model could be developed to invite lay persons to more intimately be invited into the charism and community of the Society of Jesus.

Distinctive & Unique Role of Jesuits:

Many times the most resistance to this work comes from Jesuits themselves, which limits the capacity of institutions and lay individuals in developing this work. Jesuits must take co-responsibility with lay people to foster community and belonging.

Among Apostolates and Jesuit Communities

- Create spaces of support, mutual sharing, and community building with lay people.
- Champion and offer credibility to this work through preaching, active participation, and co-responsibility.

Within Jesuit Communities

- Open sharing and listening about the current pain, struggles, and hurt that men are currently experiencing. (Could lay partners help facilitate this?)
- Commitment to intentionally examining current systems, structures, and practices of mutual support and discerning potential changes, modifications necessary to meet the needs of each man in their respective community and place.