
A JOURNEY WALKED TOGETHER

By Tracey Primrose

COME, HOLY SPIRIT, FILL THE
HEARTS OF YOUR FAITHFUL
AND KINDLE IN THEM THE FIRE
OF YOUR LOVE.

SEND FORTH YOUR SPIRIT AND
THEY SHALL BE CREATED,
AND YOU SHALL RENEW THE
FACE OF THE EARTH.



Sharing the sign of peace at a liturgy during the apostolic planning meeting

Last fall, as groups of Jesuits and their partners in ministry across the Jesuits West Province were meeting to begin the province's apostolic planning process, each gathering began with a communal recitation of the well-known words above. It was as much a prayer as an ardent entreaty. If apostolic planning was to succeed, the Holy Spirit would have to lead the way.

In announcing apostolic planning, Father Sean Carroll, SJ, provincial of Jesuits West, said the province "must be intentional and deliberate in discerning how the Lord is calling us. If we fail to do this now, we will soon—too soon—find ourselves walking down paths where the Lord is no longer so evident to us, not because he is not there, but because we have forgotten how to recognize him and listen to him."

Recognizing and prayerfully listening to the Holy Spirit's invitation has been the cornerstone of the province's apostolic planning process. But how to make room for the Spirit given the noise and 24/7 distractions of everyday life?

In Jesuits West, the idea was simple: send a broad invitation across our 10-state province so that everyone—teachers, parishioners, retired Jesuits, students, board members, Jesuits in active ministry and all those in between—could come together for spiritual conversations to reflect on three questions posed by Fr. Carroll. Where and in what ways do I see the Spirit present and moving in my ministry? Where is the Spirit inviting us to go?

What obstacles might we face pursuing this future and how should we face them?

By December of 2022, 1,250 people in 40 ministries and 22 Jesuit communities had engaged those questions. And when the 11-person steering committee established by Fr. Carroll culled through the reports that had been submitted by each group, it was clear that when you bring people who care very deeply about their ministries together in prayer and conversation, the Spirit always shows up.

The steering committee found broad consensus across four themes that had emerged from the gatherings: grounding our experience of God in the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian discernment; fostering the growth of community and the experience of belonging; promoting and supporting mutual collaboration; and exercising an apostolic preference for youth and the marginalized.

Two questions also emerged: What are the apostolic models for implementing the mission today? Is there a distinctive mission and role for Jesuits in this vision?

This spring, Jesuits and collaborators engaged in a second round of spiritual conversations, this time doing a deeper dive into the key themes and questions that had emerged during the fall. After the steering committee reflected on this additional input, the province held a two-day meeting in June at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in



Attendees met in smaller groups and in large plenary sessions.

Los Angeles. Every Jesuit in the province was invited along with two lay representatives from each apostolate. In total, 220 people came to LMU to dialogue on the fruits of untold hours of spiritual conversations.

And even though it had been many decades since some of the attendees had bunked in a dorm room, there was a spirit of energy and gratitude that permeated the meeting. In addition to meeting in both large and small groups, the program included a liturgy celebrated by Fr. Carroll as well as a beautiful dinner hosted by the LMU Jesuit community.

Quentin Orem, who recently served on a team that helped bring a new Cristo Rey school to Seattle, said, "It's been an amazing experience, and I am very grateful to have been invited into this discernment. It's been invigorating and there have been some ideas that have really caught

on in our group. I'm really glad that I'm here and that we were invited here."

Fr. Carroll said he was deeply moved that so many people in the province had come together for the LMU gathering. "There is a wonderful spirit of joy and love for one another and a real spirit and desire to reflect carefully on these areas that have emerged."

Over the summer, Fr. Carroll continued his discernment and recently sent a draft vision statement and apostolic plan to Jesuit Superior General Father Arturo Sosa, SJ, for his review.

The work, however, does not stop after Fr. Carroll receives input from Fr. General. In future months, the vision will need to become a reality as the province continues to discern elements of an implementation plan that would prioritize the apostolic directions that emerged in this process.



Loyola Marymount University's Jesuit community, on the bluff, hosted dinner for the attendees.

Most organizations, if they have an eye toward the future, will go through some sort of strategic planning. The difference here, though, is the recognition that a loving God has an opinion about the decisions we make, so we must not forget to invite the most important stakeholder.

Every time we recite the Apostles' Creed, we say: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." But how can you tell if it is the Holy Spirit or some fortunate convergence of like-minded thinkers?

For Fr. Carroll, you can always tell. "I found the Spirit powerfully present in the deep faith, hope and love of the people who came together at Loyola Marymount University. One of my favorite quotes from Pope Francis is where he said that the Church should be a field hospital dedicated to healing wounds. I look forward to serving in that field hospital with the people of Jesuits West, as we move into the future to fulfill our apostolic plan." ■



Fr. Sean Carroll, SJ, provincial of Jesuits West, celebrated Mass during the gathering.