**Supporting Women in Jesuit Higher Education:**

**Responses from Across the Jesuit Network**

***(Promoting Justice in Our Own Back Yard)***

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ABSTRACT: Over 20 years ago, the Jesuits proclaimed a desire to “want to commit the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard…solidarity with women as integral to our mission” (GC34, Decree 14: The Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society). More recently, women working in Jesuit higher education in North America responded to the question: *What recommendation/s do you offer the Society of Jesus to enhance the experience of- (and solidarity with-) women in Jesuit higher education today?* This presentation shares the responses in the interest of stimulating continued conversation on the experiences, status, and advancement of women.

Since 2015, various groups\* of women working in Jesuit colleges and universities in North America have participated in a unique professional development seminar, “The Women’s Ignatian Leadership Salon” (inspired by the findings of Walvoort, 2009, and Leimon, Moscovici, and Goodier, 2011, on barriers to women’s advancement; see Mooney & Richtermeyer, 2016). The European salon-style program is designed to strengthen leadership capacities and confidence through personal reflection, small group conversation and peer support Topics include: building on personal strengths, impression management, stereotype threat, institutional culture, virtuous leadership, networking, Ignatian spirituality.

The Salon is introduced in the context of advancing a number of mission-specific purposes (i.e., equity, diversity, inclusion), one of which is the 20 year old pledge of the Society of Jesus, as stated in General Congregation 34, Decree 14: *The Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society*. As part of the anonymous written feedback, the following statement and question is posed:

**It was mentioned that in 1995, the Jesuits proclaimed their desire to *“want to commit the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission.”***

**What recommendation/s do you offer the Society of Jesus to enhance the experience of- (and solidarity with-) women in Jesuit higher education today?**

*Paper presented at the* Commitment to Justice Conference *at Seattle University, August 13, 2017*

Responses from the 60 women participants clustered in the following categories:

Representative examples in each cluster follow:

**Opportunity and representation**

* Explicitly mentor and sponsor women for leadership roles.
* More women in senior leadership roles.
* A real commitment to female participation on university boards.
* Consider a female president at the universities.
* Develop pipelines for women leaders who are talented and infused with Jesuit values and move them into positions of leadership.

**Education and dialogue**

* Continue these types of [Salon] discussions.
* There needs to be a way for men and women to talk about gender issues together in ways that create change and provide a safe place…We need to connect discussion in a spiritual frame to the business and academic frame.
* Help the university community to be aware of gender issues especially in all the steps of promotion/ recommendation process such as tenure etc.
* Teach/help women know better how to help men know about women’s ways (peer not necessarily traditional leaders) and Flip this—help women better understand the ways of men.
* Support Women’s Studies.

**Doctrinal and procedural**

* Nothing short of advocating for women priests would be sufficient
* Provide employees with access to birth control.
* ….women are second class citizens within the Catholic church.   
  This undermines the Jesuit commitment to social justice and is an elephant in the room when we discuss the mission.
* Consider the attendance of women at the next G.C. considering the structure of the Catholic Church and Jesuit order.

**Allies and recognition**

* We need to see men in higher positions identify as allies to women. Men need to be comfortable supporting these women over men, They don’t need to be comfortable on second thought. They need to believe it and live it.
* Jesuits need to actively support women in leadership roles.
* Recognition—perhaps via Conversations or America magazines and opportunities like this to discuss Ignatian inspired work, vocations, Catholic Social Teaching, etc
* Recognize the educational talents of women (and people of color, lay men) by using academic titles, as occurs with ‘SJ,’ in verbal and written communications.

**Other and *Other*** (unconscious marginalization)

* Provide a list of effective strategies from each institution for engaging faculty and staff in mission.
* Part of the language involved “the situation” of women… Being considered a situation is a bit offensive. Creating solidarity w/ women shouldn’t be considered a problem or even a challenge.
* Please note that the 1995 proclamation speaks of “solidarity with women as integral to our (male) mission,” and does not place them on equal standing with men. In fact, the phrasing maintains a distance/distinction. I am thinking about this issue a lot, but it does not come up in Jesuit workshops even one for women.

Conclusion

GC 34, Decree 14 invites “all Jesuits to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women” and to “align themselves (as individuals and institutions) in solidarity with women" in the following ways:  
 Teaching on the equality of men and women  
 Support for the liberation movement  
 Use of inclusive language  
 Genuine involvement of women in consultation and   
 decision making  
 Appropriate presence of women in Jesuit ministries

It is my belief that the call, invitation, and implications of the document should not be- (is not-) limited to the Society of Jesus and Jesuits. Rather, it is a call to all in SOCIETY. Thus, the recommendations presented are ways that all men and women working in Jesuit higher education, and the Jesuit institutions within the North American Assistancy, can ‘align themselves…in solidarity with women.”

In summary, the findings are offered in the interest of encouraging continued listening, reflection, and conversation on the experiences, status, and advancement of women at Jesuit colleges and universities in North America.

References

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\* Groups from which feedback was solicited include gatherings of women:  
 - at Xavier university  
 - of the Upper Midwest Province and Canada (e.g., Campion College and Creighton, Detroit-Mercy,   
 John Carroll, Marquette, Loyola Chicago, and Xavier universities).  
 - mission officers of the AJCU