



March 30, 2020

Dear Colleagues in Mission,

This brief message is addressed to our board chairs of Jesuit sponsored apostolic works at this time of the coronavirus pandemic and attendant economic crisis. I pray that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy. Some of you lead the boards of large, complex universities; others of you chair the boards of retreat houses, social ministries or spirituality projects; many of you lead boards of high schools or pre-secondary schools. All of us are living with tremendous uncertainty and varying degrees of fear, anxiety and worry about the well-being of our family and friends, as well as our own personal health. We worry about our professional responsibilities as well as our fiduciary responsibilities as board members. And we are experiencing these constellations of thoughts and feelings at the same time that we are trying to respect social distance and orders to “shelter in place” as much as possible. These are uncharted waters.

Last Friday, the world was moved by the image of Pope Francis, alone in St. Peter’s Square with Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament, blessing “Urbi et Orbi” – the city and the world. In his homily, the Holy Father said that we might wonder, like the disciples in the boat during a storm on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus asleep in the stern, whether our Lord cares about what we are going through (Mk 4:35ff). I encourage us all to read and mediate on the Pope’s beautiful message. <https://aleteia.org/2020/03/27/full-text-from-pope-francis-homily-for-the-special-urbi-et-orbi-blessing/> Of course, our Lord cares about what the world is going through right now. We are not alone and he has not abandoned us. In all of the stillness and quiet these days, we are invited to a deeper trust and faith.

Switching metaphors, this strange time of social distancing can also be experienced as a sort of Lenten desert. We can recall that before he began his public ministry, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert in prayer and reflection, doing spiritual combat, if you will, with many temptations as he clarified for himself his call from the Father and deepened his sense of what his mission was in our world. Desert experiences can be very clarifying about our faith, our values and our priorities.

This time of uncertainty for our institutions and boards can give rise to a myriad of feelings of fear and doubt about the future of our apostolic projects. I cannot pretend to be in the shoes of each of you, but I would like to take this moment to remind you of a few simple spiritual principles which guided St. Ignatius in his decision-making.

For St. Ignatius, gratitude is the foundation of our spiritual lives. Gratitude for the gift of life, for the gift of health, for the gift of faith. Gratitude for the blessings we have received and gratitude for God’s providence in our lives in the past. We have been through tough times – troubled waters and storms – before as individuals and as institutions; God does not leave us alone.

St. Ignatius also warns us about making decisions in desolation and out of fear. You and your boards and the apostolic leaders you support are making all sorts of incredibly important decisions these days, and that will continue to be true in the weeks and months ahead as this health and economic crisis continues to unfold. As you consult and deliberate in your roles as board members, I encourage you to wait for peace and light in your conversations as a board before you make really important decisions.

Lastly, I remind us that part of the strength of the Jesuit network is that we can turn to one another for counsel and ideas, as we pursue strategies which will help keep our apostolic projects alive and moving forward. For some of our organizations, a near-term aspect of these strategies will include seeking avenues of government support from the recent stimulus package. For others, advancement strategies will need to take advantage of opportunities to stay connected virtually in order to seek support from our benefactors. Many will need to draw more deeply on lines of credit and perhaps borrow from endowments for a time. We should not be afraid of pursuing these if they are well-considered and well-discerned. Our colleagues who work at Jesuit institutions often sacrifice a great deal to work in a mission-driven environment. Recognizing that sometimes painful decisions will need to be made, I believe this is also a time for us to stand by our colleagues as much as possible, at least until we have clarity in the months ahead regarding what our “new normal” will be.

Gratitude; avoiding making decisions in desolation and out of fear; turning to one another for advice and counsel – these are some “guiding lights” which I hope will lead us forward in the weeks and months ahead. Please know of my deep gratitude to each of you for your leadership, support, faith and passion for our Jesuit mission. Please also do not hesitate to draw on the advice and counsel of your liaisons in the provincial office as we move forward together.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Paulson, S.J." with a flourish at the end.

Brian Paulson, S.J.
Provincial

p.s. You may be interested in attending a webinar with Father General Sosa on April 2, 2020. Registration information can be found below.



The Preferences in a time of uncertainty and COVID-19

Join us for a webinar on April 02, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. Eastern / 8:00 a.m. Central [in the USA].

[Note: The invitation indicates that the start time is: 3:00 PM CEST (Central European Summer Time)]

[Register Now](#) for a webinar with Fr General Arturo Sosa SJ.

The General will speak for about 15 minutes about how he sees the journey of the UAP so far and the road ahead. He will also reflect on the particular challenges at this time of the Coronavirus. Listeners will get a chance to write questions to which he will reply.

Jesuits, companions in mission and friends are all welcome. Don't miss this chance to listen to Fr General on these key topics.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

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