

## Ignatian Education Briefing Papers

### Jesuits and Laity: A Layman's Perspective of a Partnership Model

*by John Bowie*

Ignatian Education Briefing Papers are published from time to time by the Jesuit Education Office as a stimulus to Ignatian reflection for principals, teachers and parents.

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### INTRODUCTION:

Jesuits and laity have always worked together over the centuries: the closing decade of the twentieth century, however, has witnessed a greatly increased role for the laity in the Church, including the '*works*' (ministries) of the Society of Jesus. For example, schools that once would have had only a minority of lay people on the faculty are now overwhelmingly staffed by them - the Jesuits remain as '*animators and inspirers*' and authenticate the ministry as a Jesuit work.

With this increased involvement of laity, often in positions of considerable responsibility, there is an opportunity to develop a model that makes the '*interfacing*' (to use computer jargon) of Jesuits and laity an effective one.

This essay is a contribution to the development of such a model.

### BACKGROUND: JESUIT DEMOGRAPHY:

Recent decades has seen increased levels of involvement of Jesuits and laity in the many apostolates of the Society of Jesus. This increased lay involvement has been paralleled by two significant developments over the same time, namely, the decline in absolute terms in the number of Jesuits, and the increasing diversity of apostolates in which Jesuits are actively engaged, which has reduced the relative number of Jesuits available for '*traditional*' works, such as schools.

'New' apostolates have been especially 'social' apostolates, including working with and for refugees, the homeless and dispossessed - all part of the '*preferential option for the poor*' articulated by the Society of Jesus over the past two decades or so.

These 'new' apostolates of themselves would have reduced in any event the number of Jesuits available for any one apostolate; coupled with the decline in the number of Jesuits in absolute terms, the effect has been to reduce significantly the number of Jesuits engaged in '*traditional*' ministries.

Apart from these developments in Jesuit demography causing the need to work with increasing number of laity to sustain the ministries, there has also been over the decades, and especially since Vatican II, a growing awareness that the laity also are called to mission and have a credible place in the Church as it tries to bring the Gospel and Gospel imperatives to the world. Hence we find Jesuit and laity working together in the many ministries that include schools, parishes, refugees and the social apostolates generally.

### CO-WORKERS OR PARTNERS?

This conjunction of Jesuits and laity has most often been described as '*collaboration*' (or even '*co-operation*'). This '*collaboration*' model has been unsatisfactory, it is suggested, if only for the reason that the term 'collaboration', while technically satisfactory given its Latin root meaning, is a somewhat weak term in English that inadequately conveys the reality that occurs. It is also a term compromised by its use during and after World War II to describe those who '*collaborated*' with enemy forces of occupation.

Similarly, '*co-worker*' seems a weak term.

**It is suggested that PARTNERSHIP is a far better term to use to describe the desirable model of Jesuits and laity working together. 'Partnership' is consistent with the Ignatian notion of 'companionship': Ignatius and the early 'Companions' formed a very real partnership.**

A biographer of Ignatius, Philip Caraman, in his chapter entitled 'the early Companions', has it that Ignatius "*was able to inspire them with a unity of purpose without imposing a rigid uniformity. He trusted all and left all free*". (Ignatius Loyola, Harper and Row, 1990, p.88)

So there we have some at least of the elements of partnership ... inspiration, unity, trust, freedom.

### THE EXAMPLE OF MARRIAGE

However, this essay will attempt to present a model of partnership for laity and Jesuits working together by presenting marriage as a valid model for exploring the nature of partnership. By examining the traits of partnership, as evident in marriage, we shall find a model for laity and Jesuits, for these same traits of partnership in marriage can be applied to that relationship sought after in the working together of Jesuits and laity.

Furthermore, since marriage is '*the way*' of the vast majority of the laity, it provides a rich field for exploring the desirable Jesuit-lay relationship (or indeed, any partnership).

What, then, are characteristics of partnership, which we can apply to the Jesuit/lay situation?

In brief, the following characteristics, derived from the marriage model, are suggested.

#### A PARTNERSHIP:

- · is VOLUNTARY (as in marriage);
- implies PERMANENCE (as in marriage);
- implies EQUAL RESPONSIBILITY for the success of the purposes of the partnership (as in marriage);
- is between UNEQUAL PARTNERS -
  - Jesuits are not lay people;
  - laity are not Jesuits (as in marriage - men are not women!);
- implies SURRENDER (as in marriage - 'giving way' to the partner);
- implies COMMUNITY (as in marriage);
- involves RECOGNITION OF DIFFERENT GIFTS (as in marriage);
- involves AWARENESS OF THE LIMITATIONS of the partnership (marriage does not address all the partners' needs);
- requires a CLEAR FOCUS ON THE SHARED GOALS of the partnership (as in marriage);
- requires TRUST and CONFIDENCE (as in marriage, a lack of these is destructive);
- requires RISK-TAKING (as in marriage, there is HOPE but no certainty of 'success');
- involves FORGIVENESS (as in marriage, partners need to forgive and to be forgiven).

#### APPLYING THE MODEL OF MARRIAGE

These characteristics, then, have implications for any Jesuit/lay relationship in ministry for the ministry to be effective and enduring.

So a brief exploration of each of these characteristics is appropriate.

#### Voluntary:

A valid marriage is between partners freely consenting to enter into this unique bond - compulsion invalidates marriage since compulsion denies the dignity of the individual. Compulsion robs a

relationship of one of its essential ingredients.

In a Jesuit/lay relationship, the partners may indeed be '*thrown together*' involuntarily - a Jesuit appointed to the particular ministry by his Superior, the lay person who has been employed for the services he or she can render.

Nevertheless, both parties are where they are by choice: the Jesuit is a Jesuit through choice, the lay person has also '*chosen*' that work (e.g., teaching) that brings him or her into that Jesuit ministry.

The sense of mission calls both Jesuit and lay person to be '*persons for others*'.

Even when the legal relationship is that of employer/employee, with its implications of '*fate control*' in the hands of the (Jesuit) employer, the voluntary nature of the partnership liberates the partners from the client relationship implied in the legalistic model. Both Jesuit and lay person are called to grow beyond such a relationship.

It would be beneficial for Jesuits and laity from time to time to reflect on this voluntary nature of their partnership if only to renew and rediscover the sense of mission which started the journey that now finds them together.

### **Permanence:**

As in marriage, the partners' intention is that of an enduring relationship even if the intended time-frame may be different. In marriage the intention is '*until death*', in a Jesuit/lay partnership the intended time may be restricted, but whatever is its envisaged end time, the partnership is intended to endure until that agreed time.

But permanence of commitment, whatever the time-frame, requires regular renewal if the partnership is not to wither. As in marriage, **'long-term goals require short-term, even daily, commitments'**.

The Jesuit/lay partnership similarly requires constant nurturing and re-discovery. But such nurturing must be overt and deliberate if it is to happen at all.

### **Equal Responsibility:**

As in marriage, the partners have equal responsibility (and equal dignity) for the '*success*' of the purpose for which the partnership was formed in the first place. Where there is unequal responsibility, there is not true partnership, but rather a superordinate/subordinate relationship.

A clear resolve to make a marriage '*work*' has its parallel in the Jesuit/lay partnership: success will not happen simply because of close proximity, be it the matrimonial home or the Jesuit/lay place of ministry. Even when the duration of the Jesuit/lay partnership is anticipated to be relatively short, both partners need to

make a conscious decision to make the partnership '*work*' and to accept equal responsibility for that.

In marriage, if both partners are ready to contribute 60% and to receive only 40%, the marriage is well on the way to working! So, too, for Jesuits and laity!

Equal responsibility for the success of the partnership rather than a dependent relationship is the model for success.

### **"Unequal" Partners:**

While equal in dignity and intrinsic worth, marriage partners are not '*equal*' in the '*accidents*' of their identity: men and women are different. Similarly, Jesuits and lay people are different - lay partners in Jesuit ministries do not become '*mini*' Jesuits, nor do Jesuits become indistinguishable from lay people.

These differences mean, as in marriage, that the partners need '*space*' to be themselves; partnerships ideally are not claustrophobic or possessive and partners need to respect this need for space on the part

of the '*other*'. Partnerships can also result in authority being shared, with each party respecting the authority domain of another.

A danger that easily arises from the '*unequal*' (accidental) natures of the partners is that which perceives the different attitudes as being capable of being placed in hierarchy ... that one partner's expertise is '*superior*' to the other partner's.

True partnership, however, is complementary, but in the first place clearly identifies and acknowledges the '*unequal*' natures of the partner. Such identification and acknowledgement requires both humility and celebration.

### **Surrender:**

For a partnership to work, the partners need to be prepared to forgo their own agenda, for the sake of the common goal being pursued. For either party to be overbearing, and insisting on having the final say is to place in jeopardy the success of the joint enterprise.

The complementary nature of partnership requires each partner to '*empower*' the other - this in turn requires each partner to '*stand back*' and allow the other the freedom to be.

As in marriage, this surrender of oneself does not occur without each partner making a deliberate decision to so surrender. Perhaps we often do not allow ourselves sufficient time to reflect or to summon up the necessary resolve.

### **Community:**

Community is built on shared experience! Any unit of society, be it a marriage, a family, a group of friends ('*companions*'), a religious '*house*', all these build community to the extent in which they share the same experiences. Ignatius and the early companions shared the experiences of life in Paris and then Rome. Shared experience cements a marriage, a family, and even a nation.

Thus a Jesuit/lay partnership will be built on shared experience: a true partnership does not consist in living an associated but essentially solitary, experience.

Strategies for bonding are common practice in team-building dynamics: the strategies can be varied, ranging from shared work, shared prayer and shared recreational ('*social*') experiences. "*People in a bus*

*are not a team until the bus breaks down and they all have to push it!"* Bonding does not occur as a result of happenstance - it is the result of a deliberate decision to effect it.

Married partners devise various stratagems for bonding: the common denomination, however, is shared experience. Community is built on shared experiences rather than on the traits of the people involved.

In Jesuit/lay ministry, then, stratagems for shared experience may need to be deliberately contrived - they probably won't *'just happen'*.

### **Different Gifts:**

Saint Paul wrote about the diversity of gifts among the People of God. Effective recognition of the giftedness of another requires not only the perception to recognise it, but also the humility to 'enable' the giftedness of the other to be developed and to flourish. Again, as in marriage, a partner seeks to encourage the other in his or her gifts; rather than seeing the gifts of the other as a rival to one's own, a genuine partner rejoices in the gifts of the other and actively seeks to make it possible for these gifts to bear fruit. Acknowledgement of gifts also implies acknowledgement of the lack of gifts in the other: the partner seeks to offset such limitations.

This recognition of differences of gifts also implies, therefore, that the priesthood (or brotherhood) of the Jesuit be not consumed by the demands of the ministry - the Church needs its priests to be priests (and the religious brother to be such). Similarly, the lay person must be free to live the life of a lay person.

The demands of the ministry should not be such as to blur the different vocation of priest (or brother) and lay person.

### **Awareness of Limitations of Partnership:**

Marriage does not address all the needs of a man or woman: it could be argued that people can expect too much of marriage, expecting it to deliver what it cannot. Genuine partnership, then, acknowledges that partnership is a means to an end and is formed for a particular purpose or purposes. Lay members of a partnership, for example, will need, as will Jesuits need, a life *'beyond'* the partnership.

Partners who have other experiences bring a richness to the partnership, like fresh water flowing into an otherwise stagnant lake. Appropriate interests *'beyond'* the partnership ultimately strengthen the partnership.

### **Focus on Shared Goals:**

It should not be presumed that partners have the same goals or expectations regarding the partnership. As in marriage, Jesuit/lay *'partners'* need to develop and articulate the purpose of the partnership: personal and *'corporate'* mission statements should be developed and constantly monitored with goals being re-set as needed. It is the common purpose of the partnership that cements it and gives it substance. Conversely, the lack of shared goals can lead to disarray, estrangement and a sense of irrelevance.

### **Trust and Confidence:**

Marriage partners are called to openness and honesty: all partnerships, to be worthy of the name, require a mutuality of trust and of confidence in the integrity of the *'other'*. Suspicion and doubt are cankers that destroy partnership, but trust and confidence takes time and familiarity for their development.

In practical terms, this may well mean that in a ministry there needs to be established a forum for the exchange of hopes and fears, for the exchange of genuine feelings, positive as well as negative.

Trust and confidence are not built easily, as human frailty makes itself apparent. Deliberate strategies for building trust and confidence are necessary for an enduring partnership.

### **Risk-taking:**

The virtue of HOPE implies confidence in the graces of the Lord, because entering a partnership involves a preparedness to risk failure, to risk being hurt, to risk being challenged by another, to place one's future at least in part in the hands of another.

Any relationship involves risk of failure, for we are all sinners and all fragile to some extent.

Just as marriage - partners' leap of faith in each other is a necessary part of their relationship, so, too, the relationship between laity and Jesuits involves being prepared to take the risk of failure. The risk is either that oneself will fail or that one's partner might fail, or both! The alternative to taking such a risk, however, is to withdraw to a kind of ghetto.

### **Forgiveness:**

Marriage partners are often, even daily, required to forgive and to be forgiven. Indeed, forgiveness is part of bonding and draws people even closer. Jesuits and laity in mission will inevitably need to draw on their reservoir of forgiveness of each other.

The harbouring of hurts, or recourse to authoritarianism, destroys a partnership, be it marriage or of the kind experienced by Jesuits and laity in mission together.

A real challenge can be the establishment of the necessary processes of healing: if there has been little or no previous shared experiences, and hence no real community, forgiveness is harder to achieve. When there is a real community of spirit, be it in a marriage or a Jesuit/lay enterprise, forgiveness comes more easily and is itself an integral part of what it is to be *'community'*.

### **Open Communication:**

None of the above characteristics will be achieved without the partners' open discussion and agreement about them. The process of building a *'band of companions'* is not instantaneous, just as Ignatius himself found.

Effective communication takes time to develop as the nuances of the relationship are experienced and understood. Jesuits and laity need *'space'* to learn to communicate effectively and honestly and to embrace the proposition that *"people are proper objects of charity, but ideas are not"*. Jesuits and laity, then, need to learn to be able to challenge each others' ideas without giving personal offence.

Partnership takes time, prayer and grace. As in marriage!

**CONCLUSION:**

Even though ideals may never be fully realised, they are worth pursuing! The idealistic model presented here suggests that those Jesuits and laity who are working together in common ministries would both benefit from a reflection on the nature of their '*companionship*'. Such a reflection could well lead to more effective (and more satisfying!) ministry. For the Kingdom.

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