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Gender and Jesuit Higher Education: What Questions Haven't We Asked?

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“It’s just such a good spirituality for women.” My friend’s comment took me by surprise. She has decades of experience in not only practicing Ignatian spirituality, but also working with Jesuit novices in their formation for ministry. I, on the other hand, came to the Jesuits through higher education. Most of what I know of Jesuit higher education comes from academic environments that tend to be intellectual and critical, with only a small number of actual Jesuits present. She is Catholic and an advocate for women, at times frustrated with a patriarchal church structure in which men mediate sacramental encounters with God. In turn she is deeply appreciative of a spirituality that emphasizes God’s presence in the everyday experience of every individual. I am Lutheran and feminist, born in an era where girls are encouraged to perform nearly every kind of work, including that of pastor. I often wonder why academia in general and Jesuit higher education in particular occasionally presents invisible, unanticipated barriers to female advancement decades after the achievements of second-wave feminism. When I asked her about her experiences as a woman working with Jesuits, she gave me an answer that I was not expecting.

What did she mean? What questions *wasn’t* I asking about gender, Ignatian spirituality, and Jesuit higher education? My curiosity was not really about whether a spirituality is or even can be good for women (understanding gender as social construction makes me somewhat skeptical about general claims), but rather, *what haven’t I been seeing about the meanings and experiences of gender in Jesuit environments?*

In the last twenty years, a number of authors and publications have addressed women in American Jesuit higher education. The Jesuits’

own 1995 document on “Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society” (from General Congregation 34)—the first of its kind among Catholic male religious orders—called Jesuits “to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women.”¹ A number of authors responded, particularly in *Conversations*, by exploring issues for women in Jesuit universities. These articles often focused on percentages of women in faculty or administrative positions, but they also explored educational opportunities as well as social and theological concerns. A conference at Fairfield University in 2006 on the intersections between Jesuit and feminist pedagogies yielded a collection of essays that further advanced the conversation in specific, rich, and meaningful ways: *Jesuit and Feminist Education: Intersections in Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Boryczka and Petrino (Fordham University Press, 2012).

Twenty years after General Congregation 34, it is a good time for people in Jesuit higher education to consider: What questions haven’t we been asking about women and also about gender and sexuality in Jesuit higher education today? How can we expand the conversation? What are the implications of a mission of “the faith that does justice” for our work with students, staff, faculty, and administration? How do young women and men experience Jesuit Catholic higher education today in gendered ways? How do experiences of marginalization shape campus dynamics?

Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal therefore welcomes submissions for the Spring 2015 issue on gender and sexuality in Jesuit higher education. We are seeking essays that advance our conversations, provoke our attention, and expand our boundaries. Such submissions might explore sexuality, LGBTQ issues and

questions, understandings of masculinities within Jesuit spirituality and education, as well as gendered “invisible” barriers to full partnership in Jesuit education.

We encourage a range of topics, questions, and types of submissions (scholarship, reflection, praxis, and resources). This is a place for exploration and raising questions, bringing together the best of our disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise and experience.

We welcome submissions for the Spring issue by April 1, 2015. 

Note

¹ John L. McCarthy, S.J., ed., *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), GC 34.372.