



Australian Jesuit Province Mission 2015

Brothers and Companions in our Province ministries,

After being Provincial now for twelve months, I believe it is time I attempted to shape and describe something of what I see is at the heart of our common and shared mission. In doing so, I do not wish to suggest that the following be set firmly in concrete or be seen to narrow interpret our mission for the coming years. What it does try to do is to set in place a narrative around our mission that I see the Province needing at this time, accepting and praying that such a narrative will need to change, grow and deepen in the coming years.

Province Vision: Luke 4: 18-19

The key foundation of Mission of our Australian Province for some years has been based on this quotation from Luke's gospel:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

This foundation remains critical. It links our mission with Jesus and with our desire to be servants of his mission. All we do and hope to be comes and grows as a response to that call of Christ and his mission.

As servants of Christ's mission we are invited to assist him as he sets right our relationships with God, with other human beings, and with creation. (GC 35 Decree 3 #18)

We are also companions of Jesus as we seek, as did Ignatius, to be with him in his mission and, only with grace, in the carrying of his cross.

'When Ignatius was confirmed in his mission at La Storta, the Eternal Father said to Christ, "I want you to take this man as your servant:" it was at the will of the Father that Jesus Christ, carrying his Cross as a standard of victory, took Ignatius as servant of his mission, to labour with him under that same Cross until his work is accomplished.' (GC 34 Decree 2 #25)

This journey with Christ comes at a time in our Province where it is not hard to see and experience a painful cross of our mission at present: that the Jesuits of the Province are aging and declining in numbers, with few vocations, coupled with a history of sexual abuse involving both lay companions and Jesuits, some of whom have been dismissed. We have also seen the closure of our theologate, a major step for any Province. There are other examples.

We recognise the great demands of our world and our limited capacity to respond. We know we will have to reduce our institutional commitments while keeping an open eye and heart to new calls and ministries within Australia and beyond.

The call to mission with Christ invites a new depth and trust in our relationship with Him. This is a time when our own personal journeys in mission are invited to grow: a call to each of us for greater **spiritual freedom** and availability, a call to all our communities and works to develop that capacity for **spiritual conversation** that linked and bonded the First Companions of Ignatius. It is an invitation for all our Province works to grow in **spiritual imagination and creativity** as each person and ministry listens and responds to the needs of our time.

Some practical examples:

- ❖ I have asked those in our spirituality ministries to consider offering new forms of annual retreats – ways to invite Jesuits and lay to engage in a wide variety of locations, themes and focus for annual eight day retreats. While a retreat done alone, whether with a director or not, can bring rich blessings, there are greater advantages for ourselves and our common mission when we set time aside to gather and pray together.
- ❖ The quality of our personal lives is linked to the quality of our lives in the various communities of which we are apart. GC 35 took a step beyond the usual formulation of ‘community for mission’ to challenge Jesuits to look at ‘community as mission’. A similar point can be made of the various communities of those working together in a particular ministry in the Province – that our way of working together can itself be a witness. I encourage communities and ministries to consider those occasions – days, nights, weekends – when deeper conversations between us can occur and our shared mission is deepened.
- ❖ There is an enormous amount of creative talent in our Province – such as in music, publications, teaching, new ways of engaging with the poor, preaching etc. We need to find new expressions of this creativity, such as our use of social media and how to tap into synergies in those places where ministries are co-located. We need to find new images and expressions of our shared mission in Christ.

Three Foundations of Mission

‘Structures of governance should be streamlined, modernized, and made more flexible where possible.’ (GC 35 Decree 5 #2)

At this time in our Province history, I am suggesting there are three important foundations for our mission today. Some may prefer to use other metaphors but I have chosen the image of ‘foundation’ deliberately as these values provide key supports for our shared table of service of mission as proposed by Luke 4. To the extent we value and strengthen each of these foundations, our service of mission will be strong and visible to others as well as ourselves.

These foundations are:

- ❖ ***Ignatian Spirituality***,
- ❖ ***Solidarity between Jesuit and Lay***
- ❖ ***Mission with the Poor***.

Here are some comments non each with practical examples.

Ignatian Spirituality is the particular way in which we in the Province seek to express the life and depth of our mission in Christ. It does not seek to replace the centrality of Christ or his gospel but to deepen our faith in and life with him. *Ignatian Spirituality* is for Jesuit and lay and should be visible in how it influences meetings, decisions, strategies and planning. It is something to be shared and deepened with others.

Some practical examples:

- ❖ All staff in our ministries need to receive ongoing formation in *Ignatian Spirituality* appropriate to their role. Province induction programs are provided, and these will need to be supplemented by ministry-based programs which seek to strengthen the deeply Ignatian identity of our ministries.
- ❖ Our ministries should provide budget support for staff who wish to undertake the bi-annual Province retreat or other Ignatian experiences.
- ❖ Jesuits and lay should be able to move across our different Province ministries and still feel at home in the different Ignatian expressions they find.

Solidarity between Jesuit and Lay seeks to move beyond the concept of collaboration into forging a stronger identity and complementarity of roles between Jesuits and Lay in all our ministries. The grace of this relationship, particularly in our Australian Province, has been noted and commended by Fr General and others. This grace, not without its costs and challenges, would seem to offer a particular contribution of our Province to the wider Society of Jesus and to the Australian Church at this time.

Some practical examples:

- ❖ While Jesuits express their Ignatian identity in very particular ways (especially in a life of religious vows in community life), Lay people express their identity in their own particular ways (especially in family life and engagement in the world). These similarities and differences invite open and courageous conversations between Jesuits and Lay to understand the similarities and support the differences of each.
- ❖ While Jesuits do not seek financial rewards for ministry, Lay people rightly seek fair and equitable payment for their employment in our works and ministries. Establishing a fair and equitable framework across the Province needs careful planning, consultation and consideration.
- ❖ As Jesuits can be asked to move across different Province ministries, a sign of growth in our Province is when Lay people can choose to do this also.

Mission with the Poor seeks to deepen our love for those who are poor in imitation of Christ's preferential love for them. We share in Christ's mission when we bring 'good news' to the poor but also when we have friends who are poor. This journey involves a 'faith that promotes justice', one that seeks reconciliation with creation (a JCAP priority) but also a faith that seeks to express itself in the concrete realities of the poor today within our Australian borders and beyond them. How are we 'friends with the poor'? Our spirituality encourages boldness of vision and risk of engagement if we are to be serious about our mission with the poor.

Some practical examples:

- ❖ Everyone, Jesuit and Lay, needs to ask of themselves: 'Who are my friends who are poor?' How do I express my love for the poor in my life?
- ❖ Where are our deepening relationships with Jesuit Mission, Jesuit Social Services, Jesuit Refugee Service, those in need within and beyond our borders?
- ❖ How do we express our relationship with our First Australians and refugee Australians, those who continue to carry the legacy of our history of racism and exclusion?