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From the Editor: A Milestone, A Challenge: Let the Conversation Go On

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A Milestone, A Challenge: Let the Conversation Go On

Number 51 – the number is significant: *Conversations* has passed a half century, so to speak, in terms of the number of issues. It has been a quarter century in time, an important quarter century in Jesuit education.

The seminar that oversees and produces *Conversations* was an outcome of a meeting at Georgetown University in 1989. Called “Assembly ‘89,” it celebrated the bicentenary of Georgetown and thus of Jesuit education in the United States. It brought together leaders of the 28 Jesuit universities and colleges in the United States to confront the challenges of quickly changing times and circumstances, among them the Jesuit commitment to “the faith that does Justice,” diminishing numbers of Jesuits and of Jesuit oversight, new demands and dynamics in higher education in the United States generally, constant innovation in technology and more rapid globalization than ever before.

I attended Assembly ‘89 as one of the editors of another Jesuit magazine, *Company*. I remember that the energy at the meeting was electric: people knew there were issues and wanted to start confronting them in a new way. A highlight of Assembly ‘89 was an address by the Jesuits’ superior general, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach. Elsewhere in this issue we have comments about his address at Georgetown and about another at Santa Clara 11 years later (see p.40).

One clear incidental memory I have of the meeting was a reception in a crowded gallery outside the large meeting room. People milled about shoulder to shoulder. I knew a number of the participants, but I was not part of a school group, so I nodded politely at the small conversation clusters and shuffled on through the crowd. At one point I turned around and was startled to find standing next to me Father Kolvenbach, also pretty much alone. I said something inane like, “Oh, it’s you.” We smiled and shrugged and soon someone came along to rescue him.

One of the results of Assembly ‘89 was the decision to begin a national seminar to keep up the conversation that began at Georgetown. The seminar met and decided to publish a journal, and the first issue of *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* appeared in spring of 1992. Frs. Paul S. Tipton, S.J., and Patrick J. Burns, S.J., the presidents respectively of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and of the Jesuit Conference, explained its purpose: “We hope that you will read it, and that you will find it “enjoyable.” And they contin-

ued: “More important, however, we hope that the material contained in this and in future issues of *Conversations* will be a basis for discussions on each campus....”

The noted historian and scholar Fr. John Padberg, S.J., was the first editor of *Conversations* and the first chair of the seminar that produces it. In the inaugural issue he presented a history of Jesuit education, explaining its development and purpose through time and in contemporary terms. First, the purpose of the schools is to help the students receive knowledge and skills necessary for a productive career. Second, they foster social and political responsibility. Third, they contribute to the students’ human development in the humanities and sciences. And fourth, they “point explicitly to a vision and a destiny for humankind that goes beyond the simply human, to a destiny to be sons and daughters of God.” That is an ambitious agenda!

Through the past quarter century, *Conversations* has covered a grand variety of issues. They have ranged from core curriculum to hiring for mission, international education and justice. The immediate past issue, which focused on the environment, presented a spectrum of stories that would not have been dreamed of 25 years ago. And the issue that appears here takes us to a new level of conversation with a variety of difficult conversations about issues many of which would have been kept in guarded and perhaps embarrassed silence in the not very distant past.

Some issues pass away: a hundred years ago admitting women to Jesuit colleges could set off heated debate. So too racial integration. The ubiquity of social media was unknown a decade ago with all its healthy ability to maintain relationships and friendships and its deadly ability to fracture privacy, ignite hostilities, and spread false news.

For the first issue of *Conversations* Father Padberg wrote an article titled “Who Are These People and What Are They Doing and Why?” It explained the origin and purpose of the seminar. The answer to the first title question historically was “the Jesuits,” but that no longer suffices, Father Padberg said. Now, he explained, “the answer is, quite simply, ‘All of us.’ And what we are doing and why depends on all of us too.” Let the conversation go on!

Edward W. Schmidt, S.J., editor