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What Happened in Mexico

A Call for a New *Magis*

By Stephen Sundborg, S.J.

Worldwide Jesuit higher education crossed a frontier when it came to Mexico City in April 2010 for Conference in Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future. Once having passed that boundary, we found ourselves in a foreign territory which we were invited to make our home. I was privileged to be a participant in what I consider the best and most promising conference I have ever experienced.

Most of us know above all the address by Fr. Adolfo Nicolás from that conference, deservedly so, because of its original thought and clear mandate for what we should do and how we can do it together in our Jesuit colleges and universities. His keynote was, however, not a “drop-in-and-deliver” address.

Fr. Nicolás came early, listened, learned, engaged, responded, stayed, and inspired. Situating his milestone talk in the people and within the context of the whole conference gives it deeper meaning and greater relevance for us today.

Those who gathered came from 110 Jesuit colleges and universities around the world. They came as presidents and rectors, but also as professors and program directors, and they represented the increasing lay leadership of Jesuit higher education. Although some from Europe were prevented from coming by the volcanic eruption in Iceland, it was the largest and most representative assembly of Jesuit higher education in history, convened for a new era by a new superior general of the Society of Jesus.

As also happens at a general congregation, the

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Georgetown University students at the School of Foreign Service, Qatar campus.

deliberations of the conference were galvanized and the delegates unified by synthesizing the state of Jesuit higher education through presentations from six major regions of the world. The questions for the conference were posed by learning of the challenges of globalization, post-Christian culture, formation for Jesuit educational identity, lack of financial resources, educating with a preferential option for the poor, respecting cultural identities, overcoming national allegiances and competition, post-modernism, the pressures to educate graduates for the new economy with adequate humanistic groundings, secularization, the new technological student, immigration, and the problem of graduating “professionals but not believers.”

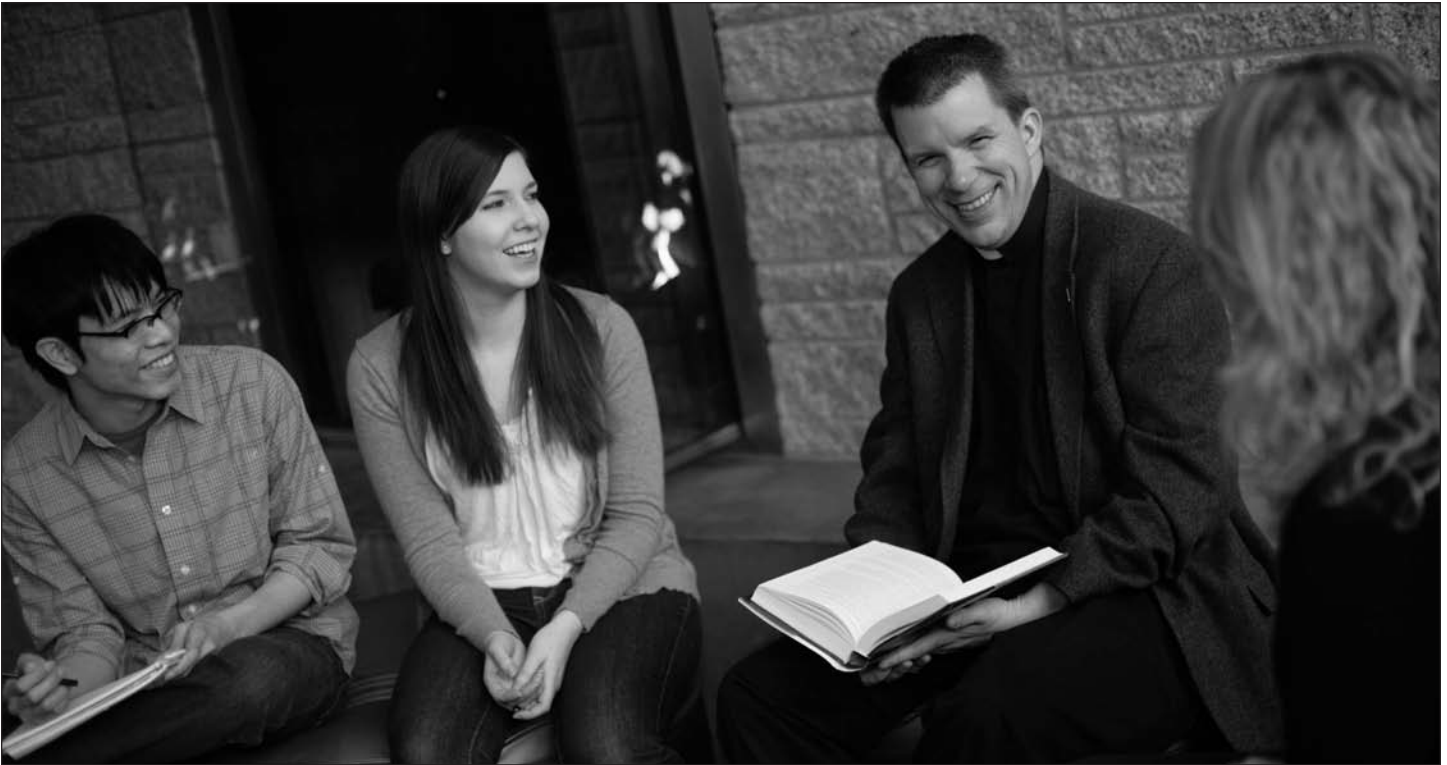
After looking at the state of Jesuit higher education from this geographical perspective, the keynote of Fr. Nicolás was further contextualized by the delegates addressing three “frontier challenges”: 1) Theology, Science and Culture; 2) Markets, Inequality, Poverty; and 3) Economy and Sustainability. The keynote thus responded both to

the world of Jesuit higher education and how the major issues of the world challenge that education and push it to new frontiers.

Crossing Borders

What Fr. Nicolás said was not meant to be the center of the conference or the principal outcome of Mexico City. It was intended to be the pivot which would enable Jesuit higher education then and there to begin to design and develop networks or “operational consortia” on vital issues, which would take Jesuit higher education henceforth into a new territory of actual international collaboration. This new, world-wide network is the border to be crossed by all of our colleges and universities and the new, foreign place in which we are asked to reside and to make our home.

I was most influenced in those days and most energized by working with a dozen colleagues from five continents designing networks which we called: “Theology, Science and the Mission of Jesuit Higher



Seattle University's Mike Bayard, S.J., engages in discussion with his students. Photo by Chris Joseph Taylor.

Education: An Ongoing Dialogue,” and “A Coordinated Study on How Cultures Shape Jesuit Higher Education: The Ricci Project.” The measure of success for the outcome of Mexico City is whether we have, as institutions and as colleagues, moved into a new global collaboration. Mexico City tried to get it going.

From the whole of this critical turning point for what Jesuit higher education can become—including Fr. Nicolás’ talk—I draw the following challenges and opportunities:

- Overcome the globalization of superficiality through educating students with depth of thought and imagination, transformed through encounters with the real (*la realidad*).
- Develop Jesuit higher education as the principal arena in which the Society of Jesus actualizes its commitment to the social apostolate.
- Go beyond our institutional, regional, and national boundaries, and our loose family resemblance as Jesuit universities, to form a single coherent, universal network.
- Establish operational consortia among our universities—taking advantage of the new technologies—to address multi-dimensional, social, human, religious, and economic challenges.
- In all of our education and research, consider not only who benefits from it but also who is excluded from it.
- Each Jesuit university and all regional associations should ask how they are morally called to

share their resources with institutions of the global Jesuit network severely lacking in resources.

- Proceed with the attitude that international networking is the new *magis* new of Jesuit higher education and a new “founding” of Jesuit higher education as an apostolate.

Remember Paul Locatelli, S.J.

There is one further challenge. I left the Mexico City conference sharing a cab to the airport with Fr. Paul Locatelli, S.J., and another professor-colleague from Seattle University. I asked Paul, who had organized the whole conference as the secretary for higher education of the Society of Jesus, how he felt. He said four things: 1) he was very proud of how it turned out; 2) he was grateful to Fr. “Pepe” Morales, rector of the Universidad Iberoamericana, who pitched in generously to make the conference happen; 3) he had never felt as tired as he did at that moment from all of the organizing work; and 4) he had a stomach ache which curiously would not go away. Paul died less than three months later from pancreatic cancer. We had all expected Paul to pull together all we had done in Mexico City and what we had started in our new networking. The Locatelli Legacy is a new, promising world of networked Jesuit higher education, which it is our privilege and our possibility to make real. ■