

JUHAN Conference Welcome

June 13/12
9 am
Oak Room

Good Morning, and welcome to the Third, Biennial JUHAN Student Leadership Conference:
“Global Perspectives on Humanitarian Action.”

On behalf of everyone at Fairfield University, let me say how pleased we are to have you with us, and how proud we are to be your hosts for the next few days, as we explore our common commitment to work together in the Ignatian spirit of solidarity, in service to our brothers and sisters around the world, toward the betterment of our societies, and in the promotion of justice.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Jenzabar Foundation for helping to make possible the participation of a number of Jenzabar Foundation Scholars from Nicaragua, Mexico and the Philippines. I'd also like to thank the students who have traveled from both near — and far — to the conference; the faculty and many presenters who have joined us, and the members of the Jesuit plenary panel who will present today on *Giving and Not Counting the Cost: The Jesuits and Social Justice*: Mitzi Schroeder, Director for Policy for the Jesuit Refugee Service/USA; Father David Hollenbach, S.J., University Chair in Human Rights and International Justice, Boston College; Chris Lowney, President of Jesuit Commons; and Father Ken Gavin, S.J., Assistant International Director, Jesuit Refugee Service, Rome.

I'd also like to thank our Conference planning committee

In April 2010 as many of you will know, representatives of more than 200 Jesuit universities and institutions around the world met in Mexico City for a conference on the future of Jesuit higher education, entitled “Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe.”

At that time, The Superior General of the Society of Jesus Reverend Adolfo Nicolas in his address noted that our contemporary milieu is principally characterized by an “explosion of interdependence” in an increasingly globalized world.

As we have all come to understand, we are one world now to a degree that we have never been before. National boundaries are increasingly irrelevant. Information can be transferred instantly around the globe — as can money, labor, goods, and services — as can poverty, disease, and ecological degradation.

This “explosion of interdependence” also means that there is perhaps no longer any such thing as a localized humanitarian crisis, or a localized conflict. The suffering of our world is brought immediately to our attention, no matter whether it is a flood in Pakistan, an earthquake in Italy, or a Tornado in Joplin, Missouri. We suffer together now in solidarity to a degree that is unparalleled in human history.

As overwhelming as this reality may be, it also offers us the opportunity to engage meaningfully and transformatively with the world, with an immediacy of impact that is also unparalleled in human history. As Fr. Nicolas pointed out, “globalization,” and the interdependence that characterizes our age, bring with it certain challenges, but also exciting new possibilities for the Jesuit network of higher education, and for the future of the Ignatian mission to the world.

One of the exciting possibilities for the future of our universities that he specified was what he called the opportunity to “Re-Discover our Universality.” Remember that within a few centuries of the death of St. Ignatius there were over 800 Jesuit schools and colleges all over the world — in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.

It was the largest educational and missionary network the world had ever seen, and it was specifically designed to be a network — to “help souls” as St. Ignatius would have said, adapting to whatever local circumstances the Jesuits encountered, meeting the needs specific to each cultural and social milieu, and creating in its cross-collaboration and cross-pollination of ideas, a truly global perspective on what it means to be a human person, and how best to transform the world for the better.

So, operating as a global network, with the purposes of spreading improvements in education and in living conditions was part of the Jesuit project from the very beginning.

The age we live in demands that we rediscover this universality of mission and outlook, and we are also fortunate that we have the technology, and other means at our disposal to engage with the world in this manner, with an effectiveness and immediacy that St. Ignatius could never have imagined.

So it was in this spirit that we launched the Jesuit Universities Humanitarian Action Network in 2008

It is the expressed mission of the Society of Jesus that its universities be engaged, hands-on, in the promotion of justice, and with putting our shoulders to the wheel to address the “gritty realities” of a world in need.

In forming the JUHAN project, we did so based on the recognition that our institutions were very good at forming young men and women in their desire to be of service, but that we were not doing enough to prepare our undergraduate students to actually undertake humanitarian action — we weren’t, providing our students with the practical knowledge and the tools for putting their desire to be of service to work.

The global need for men and women with the expertise to deal with humanitarian crises — famine, floods, earthquakes, wars — and the terrible human suffering and dislocation that attends these crises — is greater than it has ever been. Surely, then, we must train people to know how to do it.

So, for the next few days we will be sharing what we know with one another, as well as learning from humanitarian experts and seasoned practitioners, who have worked in situations all over the globe and who will share their expertise with us. It’s an exciting opportunity and I look forward to all that we will learn and discover together.

In concluding his remarks to the assembled educators in Mexico in 2010, Fr. Nicolas posed a fascinating question, which was really a profound challenge to all of us here today. In effect, he asked: “If St. Ignatius were around today, would running all these universities be what he would want to do.” Or to quote Fr. Nicolas directly, “What kind of universities, with what emphases

and what directions, would we run, if we were re-founding the Society of Jesus in today's world?"

As you work, worship, and think together over the coming days, I ask you all to ponder this question, because the answer will not come from on high. Rather, it will come from initiatives like this one, and from young people like yourselves, filled with energy and spirit, prepared to engage with the world in all its complexity, and determined to find the means to transform the world for the better.

In closing, I will quote one last time from Superior General Nicolas from his groundbreaking speech in Mexico City, "...we have today an extraordinary opportunity to have a hand in helping to shape the future, not only of our own institutions, but of the world, and the way that we can do that is through "networking." Each of us, as a member of our Jesuit Universities Humanitarian Action Network, has this extraordinary opportunity. Let us work together to seize it!