

THE STRENGTH OF THE WORLDWIDE JESUIT NETWORK

By William Kemeza

Last November, Boston College High School was invited to send a team of administrators to an international conference of Jesuit schools held in Barcelona. This conference was a follow-up to the Global Colloquium that BC High sponsored in Boston in 2012.

Reflecting on these two conferences, I believe we are witnessing a phenomenon that five years ago was completely unanticipated and now, potentially, could be one of the most significant changes in Catholic secondary education since the first Jesuit school was founded in Sicily.

The Barcelona conference of 80 educators was asked to look at our schools: the dual goals of our programs combining academic excellence and personal formation; the newly emerging research on how young people learn; the new technologies available to us and our common ancient resource: Jesuit spirituality.

Thematically, presentations and discussions were organized around a quote by a former Superior of the Jesuits, Father Hans Kolvenbach, who, in introducing a booklet to be used in Jesuit schools, stated: *"In commending this document to you, I pray that it will be another important step towards achieving our goal as educators to form men and women of competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment."*

This is the startling phenomenon: at a time when we are experiencing the rapid transformation in every aspect of human culture and the natural environment, Jesuit schools, rooted in Ignatian spirituality, find themselves uniquely suited to educate leaders who will be able to participate in a globalization that deeply respects human life and dignity and all of God's creation.

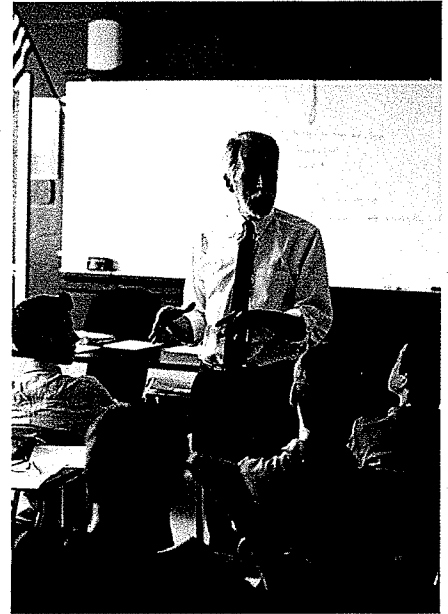
Despite the trend that the number of Jesuits continues to decline, Jesuit schools around the world are actually growing stronger. Increasingly led by lay women and men in association with Jesuits, these schools are strengthening their bonds with one another. They are working together to strengthen their core mission: *to form men and women of competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment."*

Of the eighty educators in Barcelona perhaps no more than twenty were Jesuits. In fact, except for gender, it was hard to say who were Jesuits and who were lay people such was their common commitment and belief in the mission. It is a great testimony to the Society of Jesus that such a community of lay people collaborating with Jesuits has been created and nurtured.

Father Jose Mesa began the Barcelona conference with the quote from St. Ignatius, *"What kind of new life is this upon which I am entering?"* Eliciting both personal and institutional response, it is an evocative anticipatory question that this newly emerging international community of Jesuit schools is excited to address.

I do not believe this to be an exaggeration: this community of 800 schools bears the hope of the world. This international network of Jesuit educators could be the most influential life-affirming voice heard by the youth who will become the future leaders of the world.

The Holy Spirit comes towards us as the future. It is stunning that just at the right time—perhaps in the nick of time—Jesuit schools, animated by a community of Jesuits and lay collaborators, are intentionally forming bonds with one another; coming together for a common mission: the redemption, salvation, sanctification of the world.



"What kind of new life is this upon which I am entering?"

— St. Ignatius Loyola