

## **Fresh Wineskins: How Jesuits West Invites us to Expand our Horizons**

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*Then the disciples of John approached him and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast [much], but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one patches an old cloak with a piece of unshrunk cloth, for its fullness pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. People do not put new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved." Mt 9:17*

In this passage, Jesus is addressing the incompatibility of the old and the new. He is the new, and yet people are expecting him with old categories. They are trying to see him through old lenses. And they cannot see that what he represents is the new law of love, that he himself embodies the new covenant. His listeners are good and faithful Jewish people, faithful to the covenant that they enjoy with God through promises made by Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If they are faithful to God, God will be faithful to them. So adherence to the laws like those of fasting are of greatest importance.

But Jesus says, "Really? How are you going to fast when you are in the presence of the one you wait for?" He is saying, "Please see me with new eyes! Please

don't use the same old eyes and expect the covenant to be the same covenant. I am God's new covenant of love! I am God in the flesh! Look at me! Look at what I see and do: the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, the mute speak. Blessed is the one who finds no stumbling block in me! Blessed is the one who can see me for the new law of God's love that I am!"

In the case of Jesus, he is the new wine. And therefore we need new wineskins to hold him, to embrace him. New eyes to truly see him.

We have a slightly different situation with the formation of new provinces, though the call to embrace the new is the same. All over the world new Jesuit provinces are being formed. Boundary lines are being erased and redrawn. Provinces are becoming multi-lingual in ways people never imagined. The same is true for us in the West. The boundary lines between what was the former California and Oregon Provinces have been erased. What comes first with Jesus is the new wine—he is the new wine, and he begs people to use new wineskins to embrace him. What comes first with us in the west, it seems to me, is the new wineskins, new boundary lines, the Jesuits West, consisting of the states of Alaska, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and Hawaii.

What we are called to do is to fill them with new wine.

Why do I say this? I say this because of a letter I received from Fr. General Nicolas, our former superior general. When I was speaking of province structures and efficiency, he reminded me that the reason we do this is NOT to follow the example of corporate America, namely, to cut overhead, to reduce costs, and to

increase efficiency, as attractive and as helpful as these might be. Instead, he says,

*The purpose of restructuring has always been to broaden apostolic horizons so that the Society can respond more creatively and more effectively to the call of the Lord today. We may be called to start new works, to engage established works in new ways, or to leave some works altogether. We may be called to build new networks, to enter into new partnerships, or to cross geographic, cultural, and economic borders. We may be called to special engagement with young people. We are certainly called to spiritual depth and to a deeper spiritual integration of our spiritual experience, our community life, and our service in the world. As the spotlight shifts away from the issue of province structures themselves, I hope that the provincials will be able to focus more and more on discernment of our response to the calls of the Eternal King. (ORE 15-16)*

The Society of Jesus is saying to us in the West, “You have new wineskins, new boundaries! Now, please fill them with new wine! Use the gift of discernment—finding what God wants—and use this moment as an opportunity to embrace new questions and new issues.” In a certain sense, the Society is saying to us in the west and all over the world, “Don’t think yourselves into new ways of acting, but rather act yourselves into new ways of thinking.”

I believe there is great wisdom to this, because I feel I have lived this reality in the last three years of my life.

Prior to becoming Provincial of the Oregon Province, I was happily working across town in east LA at Dolores Mission Parish, where I served as the Pastor. Early on

in my time there I was asked to be a consultor for the California Province. And soon after we were in conversations with Pat Lee, then provincial of the Oregon Province, about forming this new province. It all seemed fine and dandy—in theory—until the day we traveled to Portland for a combined consultors meeting. While the grounds of the Jesuit curia in Portland were really nice, they also seemed so different from the architecture with which I was familiar. They seemed so much like beautiful mountain lodges, there were big trees all around, and most challenging of all, there were clouds—lots of them! Heavy with rain! And in that moment, prior to the meetings, as I looked at these buildings, the thought occurred to me, “I could end up LIVING up here! Oh Sh \_\_!” And then the most revealing thought came to me, “I did not join the Society to live up here! I am a California Jesuit! I joined the California Province! I am supposed to spend the rest of my life in California!” I was both liberated by this honest self-revelation and at the same time embarrassed by my remarkable lack of inner freedom.

I then made the fatal mistake of sharing that humbling insight publicly at a joint meeting of Jesuits in Spokane in 2011, and that sealed my fate: The reward for my honesty? In 2014 I became the Provincial of the Oregon Province!

I had to leave my beloved parish in east LA, say “adios” to lots of great friends, let go of Mexican delicious Mexican food on the plaza every Sunday, and haul my stuff up to Portland, Oregon. And there, knowing only a handful of Jesuits, I had to start anew in this place that by all appearances seemed so foreign to me. (And I didn’t own a single Pendleton shirt . . . Yet!)

But what did I find when I actually began the job? I found a province of Jesuits remarkably open and trusting of this outsider, namely, me. Though they did not know me, they sat across from me in a chair and manifested their very hearts to me. They shared with me their hopes, dreams, disappointments; what gives them life and what takes it away; they shared their prayer life, how they find their community life; who their friends are, how their health is. With varying transparency, of course. Some more open and forthcoming than others, but my overarching recollection of that time was that the men *trusted* me. This humbled me. And the Jesuits of Oregon taught me something important: far deeper than the province we ascribe to is the Society of Jesus we belong to. Deeper than a province boundary is an identity. We are Jesuits. Period. And this insight has filled me with life and hope far richer than I could have ever engineered myself if I had never been forced to let go of all that was dear to me in the familiar territory of Los Angeles and California.

And so it is with personal conviction that I can say that with this new province God is indeed calling us to something new. These new, fresh wineskins are indeed a challenge and an invitation to fill them with new wine: to broaden our horizons, to start new works, to engage current works in new ways, to form new networks, to cross geographic, cultural, and economic borders. My hope is that you will leave this workshop ready to help fill the fresh wineskins with new wine.

The truth of the matter is that already much of what I have discussed is already happening. New wine is already being made!

And it is happening by the very Jesuit works that are represented by all of you in this room.

For example, Seattle Prep has been engaging Verbum Dei High School in L.A. in a collaborative project . It has been an arts course that was run through the JVLA (Jesuit Virtual Learning Academy) and was taught by a Seattle University professor. The Verb and Prep students earned credit at their high schools and at SU. The professor was in Paris for part of the semester, so in addition to being together virtually for the class, video technology allowed students to be with their professor as she showed them great works of art in some of the greatest museums in the world.

The Verb and Prep students had only one negative comment at the end of the course: they did not spend as much time together in real time as they wanted to. That's a goal for this year's class. But the point is clear: Distance does not separate us from each other when the desire to be with one another is strong.

Another example is a Jesuit, Greg Vance, who while teaching at Gonzaga Prep heard a presentation by Nancy Hanson at the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks. Perhaps it was the hope of seeing a moose, or perhaps it was a desire to adventure to the far north, or perhaps, and most likely, it was that something spoke to his heart about taking a chance and seeing if he could contribute something Jesuit to that campus which so ardently desired to be more "Ignatian." But Greg volunteered to go north and teach English at Monroe Catholic High School. He really loved the work in the classroom. And yet, as a side gig, because of the interest of a few key people on the staff, he guided a few people through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. And now that Greg has moved to yet another important need—the Newman Center at USC (Could weather be a factor? Greg is indeed becoming the poster boy for availability!)—Fairbanks has a few

people who have done the Spiritual Exercises. And we are hoping that SEEL—the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life—might be sprouted and flourish there. This was not our intention in sending Greg to Fairbanks. But it is something new that came about because one man decided to challenge himself and try something new in a place that expressed a need and a desire for a Jesuit. The Spirit is working. This is new wine. And this reveals a truth I think we will find again and again: that the wine that is made is not really of our own engineering. It is rather a by-product of our own willingness to take risks and to enter into conversation with one another.

Still another example has to do with the good things that can happen when we get to know each other, just like Greg and Nancy getting to know each other at a province sponsored event. When I was pastor of Dolores Mission, I was attending a province event and was paired up with David Burcham, who was then the President of LMU. Dave was the first lay president of LMU, and also non-Catholic. At some level I admit to being skeptical of whether a non-Catholic could be the president of one of our universities—I hate to admit that. But there it is. In any case, we were matched up and were asked to spend some significant amount of time talking about our lives—our families, our work, our relationship with God. By the end of that time I felt in Dave a connection, which we then nourished by periodic meetings over coffee. Over the course of these occasional meetings in the next several years, the challenges of being an immigrant plagued many of my parishioners. They truly feared for themselves and their families. I shared this with Dave, and we began to wonder with a mutual friend and supporter Jack Girardi, alum of Loyola Law School, what could be done. Meanwhile two young law students, Emily Robinson and Marissa Montes, had a passion for helping

immigrants and wanted to dedicate themselves to starting a clinic. Hence, the Loyola Immigrant Justice Clinic was born. Now, five years later, a team of three full-time lawyers along with law students travels to Dolores Mission one day a week and to Homeboy Industries another day to assist people with various immigration issues. The results have been overwhelmingly successful: in five years of existence they have fielded over 9,000 consultations, and have enjoyed a 98.5% success rate for their clients, meaning that all but five people have had their submitted files approved. The clinic has been so successful that it now ranks as the number 7 law clinic of all immigration law clinics in the US—they are better than Cornell, Berkeley, and the University of Pennsylvania, which are ranked 8, 9 and 10. The reason for its success, say its founders, is that it truly rooted in the community, and its partnerships are true. Some aspiring law students actually choose Loyola Law School because of the immigration clinic. Who knew that Dolores Mission's and Homeboy's needs and positions in the community would actually bring notoriety and enrollment to the neighboring Jesuit law school? This is truly new wine!

The Society of Jesus calls us to make new wine, and they give us some direction of what kind of wine is to be made. In virtually all of our recent documents, and those of General Congregation 36 are no exception, we are called to return to our roots as Jesuits, to live more closely to the poor, and to reach out to people on the margins. We heard more about his yesterday from Tim Kesicki. I came away from GC 36 with a strong sense of responsibility, that I need to articulate priorities as well. So, Fr. Mike Weiler and I did just that. Given the Vision, Mission, and Values document that our Mission and Vision Committee had elaborated over the course of the previous three years with extensive input from every Jesuit

community and work, Mike and I added some missioning priorities for Jesuits. You have read them in your various mailings for this meeting and in your packets. I would like to call your attention to some of these.

First, there is a section entitled “Commitments in All Apostolic Settings.” I believe that regardless of the ministry that any of your individual works does, there are certain commitments that each of our works need to make as members of the Jesuit family.

- First, “Cultivate intellectual depth and apply Ignatian discernment to decision-making, charisms distinctive to our way of proceeding.” Fr. Sosa was very clear that all of our works, whether high school, middle school or parish, not just the universities, need to cultivate intellectual-depth, and it is also abundantly clear that we all need to use our common Ignatian spirituality for our discernment and decision-making.
- Second, “Develop personal relationships with the poor to deepen our vocations and to better respond, individually as well as institutionally, to their needs.” Fr. Pedro Arrupe when he was General believed that his staff needed to have some contact with the poor, so he asked them all to do service hours with the poor, later called “Horas Arrupe,” or Arrupe Hours, so that they would become more sensitized to the realities of the majority of people in the world. He believed this would influence the direction and governance of the Society. I believe the same is true for us in this room. As Tim Kesicki stated yesterday, if we really want a “global worldview,” we must focus on the local and the marginal so that we might better

understand the world as our home. And just like the first companions needed to console the young mothers at nearby Holy Spirit Hospital before they could sail to the ends of the earth, so also we need to NOT see through the poor in our midst so that we can focus on larger issues. Rather, we must start with real people in real situations in our cities. I believe that if each of us has regular contact with the poor in some meaningful way, and that will be different for each of you, it will change the ways we direct our works. How?

- It will cause us to “Leverage our institutions and networks of relationships in favor of the poor and vulnerable.” I don’t expect or want any of our institutions to become something they are not. Universities need to be good universities, high schools good high schools. Parishes the same. None of these needs to become soup kitchens or homeless shelters. But each of our works does have a certain amount of power, we must admit. Can we use it in favor of the poor? If we are in relationship with the poor, we will naturally want to do that, it seems to me.
- In this day and age when there is so much political division and lack of common understanding, all of our works need to “Serve as a bridge between peoples who are estranged due to cultural, political, or socio-economic differences.” One of our charisms is to always be able to bridge distinct peoples. Our country needs us to do that now more than ever. The Society of Jesus and her works have a 500 year legacy of bridge-building.

- And finally, all of our works and communities are called to “Care for the earth, our common home, with institutions and Jesuit communities using their resources to advance environmental justice.”

The next section, just two lines, is to our apostolic partners. It is the admission that we Jesuits really do need input from you our lay partners to discern how we Jesuits might best be utilized. It says, “We invite you to discern with us how we can, together, best serve the needs of the People of God within and across our works in a particular region. We recognize that your perspective is unique and helpful in the positioning of Jesuits in our works.”

And then there are some missioning priorities for Jesuits, which I will leave you all to read.

And the final section is worth some comments. If you want to know how I am thinking of missioning Jesuits to your works, we are giving you some preferences. I am trying to think in some new ways. These are ways that will require your collaboration and working together. Let me read them:

- “Positions that support cooperation across works in a region or advance the effectiveness of apostolic works.”
- “Positions that assist an institution in deepening its Ignatian character and help animate the Spiritual Exercises at the leadership level of our works.”
- “Positions that leverage an institution’s resources to serve the poor and vulnerable.”
- “Positions of ministry in multicultural and multilingual settings, e.g., Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog.” These are languages many men in our formation already speak. We need to call upon these gifts.

- “Positions that promote dialogue and mutual understanding among those who are estranged socioeconomically, politically, or culturally.”

While these positions are certainly not the only positions to which I would assign Jesuits—we ourselves transcend these categories—these are positions which are attractive to me. I invite you to consider them, together, perhaps, in partnership with other works in your regions.

So, there is really plenty of new wine to be made, and I hope I have given you some of the ingredients that will go into the wine. I actually believe the best wine to be made is right underneath our noses. Its ingredients are within our sectors, within our cities. Its ingredients are in the people sitting around you. If we are being called to begin new works, to engage established works in new ways, to build new networks, to enter new partnerships, and to cross border lines, the most natural place to begin is right here, within our Jesuit family. Let’s look around. There is so much good being done in the western part of the United States by the Jesuit family. But most of us do not even know it. And I believe that if we were able to get to know one another, if we were able to actually engage in **spiritual conversation** with one another, talking about what most moves us about what we do, where we find joy and consolation, and where we do not, then we might be able to do what GC 36 calls us to do, which is to engage in **communal apostolic discernment**, to see where God might be calling not just each of us personally, but where God is calling a whole work or Jesuit community. If we could engage in this level of conversation and transparency and vulnerability across a region, with key leaders of Jesuit works sharing with one another where you feel God attracting them--you, pulling you, calling you--I believe our eyes

would opened to new pathways of ministry. I believe the Jesuit family would be tighter, and more cohesive, and we could stumble upon what God might really want us to do together. I don't believe that call would be to become something we are not. Rather I believe that it would be a call to connect the currently disconnected points of common interest and in so doing go deeper into who we are. In a way, we still work in silos, as if each of our works were the *only* Jesuit work in the world. And those times have to be put behind us. That is the old wine that will destroy the fresh wineskins that we have been asked to build and to use.

Before I send you on your way to talk about this new wine, I want to give you a warning: THIS WILL NOT BE EASY! The kind of collaboration I am talking about goes against so much of what we have learned. Each institution has learned to survive, and sometimes our institutions see one another—especially in the area of fundraising—as threats to one another. We will need to fight against a lot of what we have already learned. Look at what happens when a grown man tries to learn to ride a bike in a new way:

(Video)

How much neuro-plasticity do you see in this room? We are all smart people, gifted people, experienced people. All of these gifts might get in the way when it comes to trying something new. Why did Jesus so value young people, children? Why did he say, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. For although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike,"(Lk 10:21). We have to become, in a way, like children, and open ourselves to a new way of being. If it is to be new wine—truly new wine—I

believe we are being called to a new level of vulnerability with one another and trust of one another.

Ultimately, we are being called to trust God, that God is leading us to a new place. Let me say that again: Ultimately we are being called to trust God, that God is leading us to a new place. And we have to let him lead us there.

So, we begin our day. The purpose of today is to bring you together—first by region, inviting those of you who live and work in a given region to talk and listen with one another, to learn about each other, and to begin to ask the larger question of what new wine you might be being called by God to make together in that region; and then by sector, to join with those who do the same or similar work to yours but in different cities and regions, to see what new wine God might be calling you to make together.

And before we do that, I invite you to take a few moments in quiet. To let this talk seep in. To sit in silence. And then, perhaps with someone around you you don't know, take a risk and share with them something in your heart. (Pause).

I have every confidence that God wants good things for us here in Jesuits West. God is not finished with us yet. God is calling us to reinvent ourselves. We have the fresh wineskins. We are now invited to fill them with new wine. Let's get to the winemaking!