

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

“Our mission is not a closed thing that we can define or grasp. We need always to leave a gap where the Spirit can enter and surprise us. How to leave that little gap is the issue.”

~ Father General Arturo Sosa, SJ

Although we are not able to conclude our MPE with the Peer Visiting Team until after the next President of Regis University, Dr. Salvador Aceves, has been officially inaugurated, we offer the following five conclusions and resolutions so that “in 20 years Regis will thrive as a vibrant Jesuit Catholic University.” To borrow from the Universal Apostolic Preferences, foremost in our hearts as we look to the next generation is the call to walk with our students, indeed, with all youth, in “the creation of a hope-filled future.” In the words of Pope Francis, we are “co-creators” in a task larger than us. “God asks us to dare to create something new,” and each member of the Regis community, not least each of our students, brings distinct gifts to the table.

1/ A Relational Culture: Collaboration, *Cura Personalis*, Communal Discernment

Repeatedly during the MPE listening sessions, when asked to describe what they most appreciate about working at Regis and what gives them joy, people reached for phrases such as the following: a “relational, collaborative culture”; “teamwork, friendship, respect, are at the heart of Regis culture”; “when we’re at our best, there’s a strong sense of ‘family.’” In the words of the Mission Statement, we are called “to celebrate and embody God’s love for the world,” and to accompany our students in that sacred vocation. Yet we cannot hope to advance this vision if we fail to embody God’s care for one another in our daily working relationships at Regis. Given the significant stressors on the institution and the morale of Regis employees in the last several years, it is crucial for university leadership to make sincere efforts to bridge the gap between our public profession of a commitment to Jesuit Catholic values and how well these values are actualized in structures that support the well-being of Regis employees.

Especially as we move forward with lay leadership at the helm, it is arguably more important than ever to maintain and cultivate, as it were, a vibrant lay *esprit de corps* in and across the total university environment, a spirit of unity-in-diversity and mutual help that will shape the quality of life for Regis employees and positively impact the student experience. Put another way, Regis’s modest size compared with other AJCU institutions is not a weakness but a real strength, allowing for a certain intimacy and familiarity across divisions, and perhaps a nimbleness and flexibility that may be lacking in larger institutions. At the same time, when resources are constantly limited, there is a danger that the Jesuit value of “Magis” can serve, intentionally or not, as a justification for asking people to “do more with less,” a kind of transactional, “keep your head down and push through” way of proceeding that will certainly impact the student experience in ways we are not always aware. As the MPE listening sessions confirmed, such a climate can sow weariness, frustration and distrust between Regis’ leadership and employees.

In sum, people across the university have expressed a clear desire to preserve and strengthen Regis’ *relational culture* at its best, a place “where we can talk about difficult issues with love,” with a “capacity to sit in and with discomfort; to listen and hear, so as to discern together, rather

than dismiss and revert to old patterns.” We seek an environment that facilitates common purpose, shared humor and joy, reasonable work/life balance, and a desire to stay with Regis over the long haul. As Fr. General Sosa reminds us, *“We are not an NGO or a business. We are the Society of Jesus, religious and lay people following Christ both at a personal and communal level. Discernment is the foundation. As leaders, you must take the risk of discernment.”*

With these words of Fr. Sosa in mind, we resolve to build on Regis’ relational culture at every level through practices of collaboration, *cura personalis*, and communal discernment. How such practices are embodied across different divisions will vary, and each unit is best positioned to discern what such practices will look like for them and those they serve. Let us resolve that our commitment to a collaborative culture of care will be felt in our daily interactions with one another, and above all, in our presence and service to students. Our care for them is a seed that blossoms outward, by God’s grace, into an embodied love for self, God, and the world.

2/ Ignatian Spirituality and Pedagogy

As noted above, the many opportunities offered by University Ministry, the Office of Mission, the Regis Jesuit community, ODEIE, Student Affairs, and other stakeholders in the spiritual life of the university only partially address the desire and need for spiritual support and development, particularly in the offering of Ignatian retreats and spiritual direction. For Regis to continue to thrive as a Jesuit Catholic university, we need to invest now in programs to help staff, faculty and students who desire to grow in Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy. Two of the Universal Apostolic Preferences come into play here: first, pedagogically, to “accompany youth in the creation of a hope-filled future” involves promoting distinctively Ignatian approaches to teaching, academic excellence, and student affairs that seek to accompany and develop the whole person; second, to “show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment” calls for greater opportunities for those who wish to deepen their fluency with Ignatian models of spiritual formation, institutional decision-making, and personal vocational discernment.

Convinced of the importance of continuing to develop a strong cadre of committed lay Ignatian Companions in Mission, we resolve to grow in our capacity for offering the Exercises along with regular spiritual direction and Ignatian pedagogical formation to key members of our Regis community, including trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumni. Similarly, we resolve to work with UCS Province leadership to empower our lay leaders to become familiar with the province and to know how to develop deep relationships and clear channels of communication with Provincials and other Jesuit leaders. Developing new models for offering mission development for affiliate faculty will require creativity and collaboration across divisions and programs, as well as learning from best practices of our sister universities in the AJCU network.

3/ Racial Justice, Care for the Marginalized, and Reconciliation

At General Congregation 36 in 2016, the global Society of Jesus committed itself to the work of reconciliation in three forms: reconciliation with God, with one another, and with creation. In reality, as Pope Francis has insisted, these are not three but “one work of God, interconnected and inseparable.” Embracing Francis’s and his predecessors’ critiques of the global economic system – describing it as “predatory,” a system that which “discards natural resources as well as

people” – GC 36 noted that disproportionately the victims of this system are indigenous peoples and women, all deemed expendable before the rapacious forces of development. “We are called to support these communities in their struggles, recognizing that we have much to learn from their values and their courage.” The Jesuits here strike a powerful note of humility, incumbent upon all of us: *we have much to learn from their values and their courage*. Fully embracing the vision of Pope Francis, GC 36 concludes, “the only adequate solution must be a radical one.” Jesuits worldwide, through all their apostolates, “are called to help heal a broken world, promoting a new way of producing and consuming, which puts God’s creation at the center.”

Our third resolution builds from the previous two, speaking directly to our Regis mission that places a Jesuit Catholic education in service to the building of a “more just and humane world.” While our commitment to social justice is strong, we resolve to become even more adept and consistent in articulating and living a “faith that does justice.” Approaching the question of justice in ways appropriate to the norms and methodologies of all the university disciplines, we resolve to focus our scholarship and teaching on the ongoing scourges of systemic racism, discrimination and bias in all their insidious forms, as well as social and cultural inequities that disproportionately impact communities of color, LGBTQ persons, the economically disadvantaged, and persons with intellectual or physical disabilities.

Once again, if we are committed to embodying God’s compassion and justice looking outward to the world, we must not shrink from examining our practices in the Regis community itself, looking inward. As noted above, a truly Catholic vision of a “faith” that seeks justice is not limited to the Christian or Catholic faith; indeed, the call to social concern and love for neighbor runs through the heart of every major religious tradition. We resolve to explore how Regis might better respond to the needs and wisdom of other faith traditions so as to create a more welcoming and mutually enriching interfaith environment. Moreover, whatever success we have in recruiting first-generation students, Hispanic, Black, Asian and Indigenous students, as well as faculty and staff of color, it is essential that these efforts are matched by resources to ensure that their welcome and potential for flourishing at Regis is not short-lived. Indeed, with respect to those coming to us from marginalized communities, *we have much to learn from their courage*.

4/ Sustainability and Integral Ecology

As creation itself is threatened by rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, biodiversity loss, ocean warming and acidification, and severe water shortages in the Rocky Mountain West, how are we listening as a university to the cry of the earth, and what are we doing to build a more just and sustainable environment? People living in poverty bear a greater burden of environmental degradation. What are we doing to hear their cry and to promote their well-being? In the words of Pope Francis, “a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (*Laudato Si’* 49).

While it is easy for the challenges to feel overwhelming, we are beginning to build a foundation at Regis that can support this commitment to integral ecology and ready us for the internal conversion—individual and collective—required for this critical moment. Our curriculum features ecological education and sustainable development. Our faculty includes environmentally focused scholars in disciplines of science, sociology, humanities, business, and health care. Our

First Year Experience program orients traditional undergraduates to contemplative ways of seeing and being in relationship with the environment as a significant characteristic of our academic community and element of our mission. Our mission statement empowers us to ask how our education and institutional practices can support a more just, humane, and sustainable world: “*Regis aspires to be a community of learners who labor for a transformed world and renewed ecosystem, and who journey as companions, responsible to each other.*”

In ways that relate organically from the previous three resolutions, we resolve to build upon these foundations toward an integral ecology by engaging the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and the UAP on “Care for our Common Home” in ways befitting a Jesuit, Catholic university: educating on the ecological crisis as well as potential solutions; promoting environmental scholarship and research; advocating for good policy; nurturing an ecological spirituality; being responsible use of resources; and reducing our environmental footprint. As Pope Francis has said, “the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (*LS* 217). We commit ourselves to interior conversion, to justice for those communities most impacted by environmental injustice, and to “journeying with youth” in care for our common home.

5/ Relationships with the Church and with Civil Society

Our commitment to serve the local and universal Church is deep, broad, and sincere, a constitutive part of our Jesuit Catholic identity. While our links to the universal Church are strong—through our affiliation with the UCS Province, Catholic theological societies, *Jesuit Higher Education*, the AJCU, faculty publications, service, and public speaking—we lament that our relationship with the Archdiocese of Denver has been strained for some years. Our desire for reconciliation is sincere, and must be a priority for the new President. At the same time, as listening sessions across the university and with our sister Jesuit apostolates in the region have made eminently clear, our efforts toward reconciliation must not compromise our public commitment to those persons and communities most vulnerable in society and church, nor our call to engage difficult questions in a university way. We resolve to continue striving to be a “social projection” for solidarity, compassion and justice for the most vulnerable in society.

Recognizing that much good has been done in the past five years to grow and sustain our relationships with the surrounding neighborhood and City of Denver, here, too, we are called to creatively imagine new ways of building partnerships toward the civic good in and through these local and regional relationships. As well, we must do more to build bridges to those Catholic institutions, churches, and schools, whose students and parishioners have not thought of Regis as really “theirs,” as realistically accessible, as a resource for education, spirituality, or social justice advocacy. We resolve that Regis University should no longer be a “hidden gem” in the Rocky Mountain region, and thus, to take measures that make more widely visible and accessible our Jesuit Catholic identity, our academic excellence, and our passion for creating a better world.