

Speech of Fr. General at JAAI Meet at St Xavier's School, Delhi on Feb. 21, 2008

Fr General was requested to talk about his vision for the Alumni for the next 20 years :-

I don't know if I would be able to respond to this, because as somebody said, in 20 years I will not be around. I can say I leave behind something that I would love to follow- up. This morning I was talking with the Jesuits. I have made it very clear about something, that is coming very clear to us even in Rome also, that as the world becomes more and more intercommunicative and we are more aware of problems, like the water problem, or issues in the world of justice, education new projects and so forth all we realize how negative we are, all of us. We need to coordinate much more.

Anybody who has a penchant to work hard to improve and respond to the challenges of the needs of the world, then the alumni of our schools becomes always an object of attention. And more and more people are coming to us and ask us about the alumni. These are very good people, highly motivated people, professionally involved in one society from different countries. What do they contribute to different projects, from water to justice to human rights to whatever you mention? So this is becoming more and more and awareness. We Jesuits are also becoming more and more aware that many of the things that we would like to do, maybe we can do something but only if we work with a wider community and for us the community of the Alumni would be a very natural expansion of our own concerns because we know that. Thank Goa, it is encouraging to know that Jesuit Education is not lost, is not wasted. You are proof of it.

It really worked in the years when we are becoming a person. What we learnt does remain in our hearts and in our minds, so much so that there is a very high awareness now that the Associations of Alumni carry on values, perceptions, a sense of humanity and a sense of justice in our world that is very valuable. Now the question that comes for us is how can we channelize them? Are there ways to channel them? I wouldn't like, and now I am speaking in my own name; not in the name of the Jesuits, I don't think it should be us channeling everything. Because then we become clerical, even though we try to have the wide perspective of St Ignatius and all that concerns of the world, still we have our own limitations and our own biases.

I think it should be a parallel journey of what we Jesuits think we could do in the world and what you think from the situation of a lay person or professionals involved in business, education or any other areas, that should be done and can be done and in this process to have a plan for dialogue and communication so maybe joining our forces together we can sustain or help or contribute somehow to what you think can be done and the same, you can help and sustain and support and contribute to what we think has to be done. So, I think in the society of Jesus now, after four centuries and a half, we are very much aware that our mission is not our mission. It is the mission that God, in whatever terms you express the reality of God, wants for humanity: Better life, more justice, more human rights, more sharing, future for our children and so forth. So, in this line we are convinced that all the forces are needed, but all the forces with each one contributing what they can, and then coordinating this.

Now how will I vision that twenty years from now? I think what we have to do is think about now and then maybe next five years. For instance, the water project, this would be to my mind one of the wonderful projects. It is concrete; it has to do with life, with sharing, with life in all senses, survival of the environment and the world around us. In a project like this, what can be done now is really to contribute to make cleaner and healthier water more available.

But in the process we create a community. And in the process there is a new awareness that water is a factor of union. In water, the differences in society don't count. When it comes to water, we all need it. There is a map of the world that I had in my office in Manila and at the bottom there was a Chinese saying: "One Sea, One Family." And this is an old Chinese saying that the Seas unite the human family. It would be a good slogan for "water unifies the human family". We all are 80 percent or 90

percent water in the human body. So we all can be dehydrated. And the Sea unites all the countries of the world. By sea you can go anywhere; it takes a little longer than by plane.

There is a whole reality of water uniting geographically, symbolically and also structurally the human body and the human mind. That could be a very good example of how far our common project can be a unifying factor in human concern. How to feed children, how to keep children hydrated when the situation becomes tense. You know from half research, half science fiction that the next world war will be for water. When people are talking about water as a chance for war, we can think of water as a chance for unity. It is a new wealth that nobody should control by making it a privilege.

These are the things where I think in a short term project like this, in five years many things could happen. Then is the time to start on thinking about the next five years and so forth, but in which the thinking is both from the Educators, the Jesuits, but also from you who are in the professional world and you see many things that we don't see. Thereby, my hope with the Alumni is that they are also bridges for us to come in touch with the whole world that we don't have the means to reach but you are there.

My classmates they were also very happy with the election and so a group of them came to Rome. My classmates who belong to Alumni Association in Madrid, they came to Rome. Until then they were very quiet, just celebrating being alumnus, without further concerns. Now they realize they have to have to have wider concerns. And that they can contribute and began to deal with their own issues, their own problems, and I think that is another area where maybe we can cooperate.

Water and justice and other issues could be inside all of you: Families, education of the children, the future that is opening, so in this also we can be partners in the dialogue and eventually we can be also contributors. So I think, in this collaboration, communication with each other; there are many areas where you can help us and there are some areas where we can help. And I think now all over the world there is a movement to strengthen the Associations, not as social Associations but as apostolic Associations. Taking care apostolic of the widest that we can take so not necessarily a Christian mission in the church, but the mission that education that brings us new humanity and new society, humanity with very strong values of inner-liberation because I think where Indian culture has been so strong.

These are the things that I hope; that the exchange with Spain, or America or East Africa or Japan, I think Indian alumni can provide. So therefore, I have more hopes than answers. I hope that the cooperation can be a moving one. When friends or nephews or nieces, that are so different from us, they ask me for a blessing for a wedding, in my message always the key to grow happy is if you can grow together. You cannot grow together because you are very happy now and further grow apart. And I think something like this applies to alumni and Jesuits. If we can grow together we can continue communicating on common issues, then I think our partnership can develop, that will be my hope. It is not a one-sided thing. It is a growth together in issues that are important not for us but for humanity.