

## Lessons from the Corona Virus and the Future of Jesuit Universities

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It is my great pleasure to be with you today, I'm coming from Washington DC, in the United States. Father Michael Garanzini is my name. I am the Secretary for higher education for the Society of Jesus. And it is a pleasure to be here with you today at the Javeriana, because Javeriana is such an important university for the Jesuits, for the Society of Jesus. It is one of our leading universities, it is one of our most comprehensive universities and you and your rector, who I am very grateful to, father Jorge, I am very grateful to because you set the example for what we should be doing, not only in Latin America, but also around the world. So, thank you very much for this invitation.

And I have been asked to speak with you about some lessons that we have learned during this pandemic especially, and more recently in our work in higher education. So first I want to mention though, that I understand this is a process here of strategic planning. And that you are doing, I believe, a discernment. And a discernment process I think is very important for us to think about as we begin today. You know discernment is not about decision-making, in the Jesuit sense, is not necessarily about decision-making. Discernment is more about listening. Listening to your own voice and what is going on inside you. Listening to the way the spirit is talking to you, where your feelings are going, where your perceptions are going. Discernment is also about listening to the voice of other people, of the people around you. Because the spirit is also talking through them. And then is all of us listening to where the world is going. Looking at what is happening in our society and where are the cries. The cries specially of the poor, the cries of the young, the cries of the marginalized, where are those cries speaking to us.

So is more important than making decisions but to have listened well, and I encourage you during this process here, to pay attention to how you listen and the quality of the listening. And whether or not you can really say "I have heard those around me". So that's the most important thing, I think that I want to say, is to encourage you in this process to do some serious listening.

To prepare for this, I asked people from around the Jesuit institutions around the world. I asked them several questions. I asked the leaders to tell me, what are we learning in this pandemic? What impact will the pandemic have on education and your institution? And when the pandemic is over, what do you think the lasting lessons will be? What are the repercussions of what is happening? And to give us perhaps a new normal. The new normal may look, in some ways, like the past, but in some ways, it may be quite different.

I am sure in Bogota, I am sure as this is the situation around the globe, but especially in major cities, and now also in the country-side too, in the rural places, that pandemic has had a serious effect on closing down our life together, our community, our economy and the social gatherings

that we were so used to. If Bogota is like is here in Washington D.C., in New York, in Rome, in Delhi in India, then your life has been very disrupted. And not only fear, not only worry about economic stability, but the long-term impact of all of this for our social life, has been seriously impacted.

So, what are we learning? I would say from this brief survey is not scientific, because I asked people informally to send me their responses to a series of questions. But what I take from these responses, is amazing how similar the reactions are around the world. So when I say people are fearful, people are worried as much about the economy as they are about their health situation, this is true around the globe.

There is much hesitation to say we know all the lessons. I am not sure we know everything yet. But there are some things that are becoming clear already. Some of those lessons for example are: there is a growing fatigue with this pandemic. People are becoming very lazy about wearing masks, about washing their hands, about the social distancing, because they are tired and they want to see it over. So we know that there is this social fatigue. We know too, that our young people, who have learned to go to classes online and the faculty who have taught them online now, are getting tired. Are getting fatigued from this kind of vehicle for learning. Hopefully you will be able to do some discussions in person. But you too may be receiving much of this planning effort via Zoom and via the technical media that is coming over the internet. So there is a certain fatigue. But we do know that we are adjusting to this fatigue. And that some things may be for the better. So let me talk for a moment about what I think might be better, that has come from this pandemic.

So the positive impact of the pandemic, I know that we are seeing everywhere in the world that technology has the potential for us to reach more people and overcome more hurdles of space and time. More challenges that space and time present. And the university is now conceiving itself, thinking of itself as a vehicle for transmitting education, but is not bound by place or time. We can record, we can reach way past geographically, way beyond the city where we are located, to marginalized people, to people who could never make it. And we can even do much of our work via the internet. And we don't have to always be together. This could have very big impact on the way we think about the university functioning in the future.

We have also seen that faculty, teachers can adjust, and they can adjust well. And very creatively. That they can learn to deliver their lessons through a new medium. It is not the ideal, it is not the same as a classroom, but it is possible to transfer information, knowledge, and to encourage people to learn and even discuss via this technology. So we've learned that this is a great vehicle for bringing us together without space and time becoming an obstacle.

We are learning that students are able to develop their skills, you now have to pay closer attention when you are online, when you are learning with technology. You have to be more disciplined and that's not a bad thing. That's a good thing. And we are learning the teachers have access to a rich variety of possibilities for teaching. I give you an example: a teacher friend of mine, said that everything he teaches now, if the author is living, he writes to the author and asks if the author would like to be interviewed or would agree to be interviewed for his class via this

technology. So he says “I bring people into the classroom from many places that I would never have dreamed of before”. And they are willing to come, it’s not very complicated, you simply do like this, you simply go online and you record your message and then deliver it to a live audience. So this is an amazing discovery. Counseling, medicine, are also discovering that we can do these things for people who have the difficulty for being in the same place with us. Telemedicine, teletherapy are now very much becoming part of our daily life, the way we normally do things.

So let me talk about some of the negative things that we are experiencing. Technology cannot replace the hunger and the need for social distancing, for social contact, rather. It cannot replace the hunger we have to interact with others in a real setting, in real time. It’s difficult for students, it’s difficult for faculty and meetings, it’s difficult for anyone in the administration, to feel they completely can judge the sense of the group by simply this medium. It’s more difficult. And there’s something more draining about this, it takes energy from us to spend so much time looking into a screen and trying to absorb things and so on.

Many teachers have told me recently that their students turn off the camera, because they think they’re tired, they go to do something else. They get very distracted because there is so much zoom time or technology time that you can manage. So our attention spans are not built for this kind of intensity. I admire you if you spend the entire half hour looking at this video and don’t find yourself daydreaming and wondering.

The presence of coaches and mentors and aids, seems to be very important to keep young people on track. So it does not replace, the faculty member the teacher online cannot replace what that individual attention can do to support students, to deal with them on a one on one basis. We can’t ignore that and we can’t lose that.

And we cannot do away with the structures and the organization of the University, a sense of place that is the university, that is the home. We still need places for people to be together, we will always need the physical campus, we will always need faculty offices, we will always need to come together in an auditorium to discuss and to debate, and so on. This is not going away, and once we have a vaccine much of this will return. Perhaps not as often because we learned there are many things we can do more efficiently through technology.

So what is the likely impact of this Corona virus pandemic on our future? What does our future bring? I think more faculty and more institutions are ready, because they are capable now of expanding their reach at the university level especially. That is, they don’t need to think of their classroom as simply a physical location. Teachers now also know how they have to prepare lessons in order to communicate them more effectively through this technology. And the universities’ walls are lowered, that is we are reaching further, and we are reaching more people. The classroom may be opened up for the marginalized in ways we have never conceived of before.

So we are ready to offer online and distance programs with much more, given this resources. And we are going to be financially stressed because of the pandemic. Many families have lost their

income. We are going to have to become more efficient. We are going to have to think of less overhead expenses and more expenses directly related to delivering education. We are going to have to become better at administration, perhaps a little bit leaner, a little bit less expansive and we are going to have to learn to live with less income. Because higher education which is already expensive for people, is already costly, is going to be stretched to do more with less.

I think too that good faculty will have to learn to be more creative. How do we use the time online, how do we instruct students to prepare for online, and how do we deliver an education online. That maybe requires a little more skill than what we thought before was necessary. And it seems to me that there is a new appreciation of community, clarity of our mission, importance of our coming together as a community and how can we use our Catholic philosophy or Catholic heritage as a way of delivering more. What people are hungry for what people really yearn for is a narrative that makes sense. A narrative that describes how interconnected we are as people. How important it is to have professionals, and working class and people they're willing to do many jobs that we take for granted. The people that brings us our food, the people who deliver us some public transportation, the people who help us with security, the people who work in cleaning our buildings in our hospitals, we are all part of a community. And we have a better understanding of that now because we see what has happened when that community has been disrupted.

And now I would like to say a word about the impact on our students, what I think this pandemic is doing on this generation that is experiencing this now. How is this impacting young people? Well I think as I've mentioned just previously, they have a deeper sense of how interconnected and inter-dependent we are as a planet, as well as a country, as well as a region, as a city, as well as a university. That is, they have seen what happens when our life is interrupted, and they have seen the toll that takes on their fellow citizens, whether is the local or whether it is the larger community or whether it's even the globe. We count on one another around globe in order to do and live the way we live.

They'll have a deeper sense I think, of the place of creation. We are not masters of creation, we are hardly masters of our own destiny. And this pandemic has shown the weakness of our belief, the folly of our belief that somehow science and we are in control. There are bigger causes and bigger factors that surround us and we don't have the answers for everything. This has been humbling for those in medicine, and it has been a humbling experience for those who are in politics and civic government, it has been a humbling experience for those who are administrators, trying to figure what do we do next, what is the best way to lead my organization or my city or my country.

I think we will have a better sense of the contributions of all those in the economic scale, as I mentioned before those people who deliver us to our jobs, who take care of our automobiles, who brings us our food, who cook our food, who clean our restrooms, these are people that we all depend on and we must respect. And I think we will be more inclined, and this generation will be more inclined, to see that it is a life of service that matters. That we are all vulnerable and that

those who serve others and have a mindset of service, are in fact more whole, more healthy and happier people.

In short, I think that we have an important contribution as a Catholic University and as a Jesuit University. We have the story. We know that God has given creation and put it in our hands. That's the first part of the story. We also know that God is in this creation and we can find God in all things, a very Jesuit idea. We also know that we have a way of looking at the way our relationships are structured to be more just, more rational and more fulfilling for one another. That the common good is our ultimate goal. The common good is our inspiration and what we strive for. We have this in Catholic social teaching, we have this in our biblical sense of where we are from, we have this in our tradition. So we have this to offer. It is not a story as many secular universities must contend with. It is not a story of science either wins or we all lose. That's not the story. Our story is one of inclusion and of resurrection. That is of the conquering of evil by goodness, by love. And that story is needed desperately by young people today. Your university as a Catholic university has the treasure of bringing this to them in everything that you do. So we want to accompany young people to give them sense of hope, we want to be very concerned about the marginalized and we want to attend and care for our creation for all the planet, the people and the goods that have been given to us.

And so that's your job, to figure out how to make your University this kind of University that brings these things to the consciousness of students and of teachers so they may advance the kingdom of God in this planet, and so I thank you for this time. Amen.