The promise of the future

' I have seen the future, and it is now', said Nam June Paik, the Korean who invented video art. The future is an exciting place to be. It promises instant information, rapid mobility, and ready opportunity.

In Asia, as elsewhere, the promise of the future is marked by familiar tensions between the powerful global forces driving economies, communications and politics, and the local cultures, nations, languages or even persons that these forces put at risk.

Although communication tools have improved, many people experience isolation and exclusion. Scientific knowledge touches the deep mysteries of life, but the dignity of life is threatened. Our world itself is threatened.

Jesuits also live this tension between the global and the local. Jesuit in East Asia and Oceania describes the small things that Jesuits do in their local Provinces. It also puts them into the larger world of Christ’s call to us in Asia. We need to recognise the global forces that shape the future of Asia. We need also to discern our response to them.

The vision of St Ignatius was both local and without horizons. ‘Our vocation is to travel through the world and to live in any part of it however’, wrote Ignatius in the Constitutions. For Jesuits, this part of the mortification of which Budi Goncales speaks in this issue.

Because our mission is Christ’s mission, it reaches to the whole world. We have a mission to the frontiers, while we live at the heart of the Church. Sometimes the frontiers are geographic. Sometimes they are fault lines within the human heart.

When, like Ignatius, Jesuits desire to respond to the greatest needs, it becomes normal for them to live and work away from home. This does not mean that all Jesuits do, and so to develop shared initiatives that will foster in union, mutual communication and a common vision.

In this edition you will read a little about how we communicate in our Provinces.

In Asian spiritual traditions, life is a way, a journey, a continuity between past, present and future.

The Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania was formed about 40 years ago to develop the Society’s extraordinary potential as an international and multicultural body. Its aim is not to make all the Jesuit regions uniform. It aims to build on what local Jesuits do, and so to develop shared initiatives that will foster in union, mutual communication and a common vision.

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Mark Raper

Christians in Asia learn too that Christianity is a way, that Jesus is a way. We need a way if we are to live, to grow, to search, to love, and so to build union, harmony and peace.

So we live the tensions between the global and the local, the universal good and particular good, the past and the future, in ways that will be for the good of everyone. We seek to live today the future that we dream.

Mark Raper
A modest service

Bernard Arputhasamy hopes that one day he will go out of business because there is no need for his services. He is Coordinator of Jesuit Refugee Service Asia/Pacific.

Unfortunately the needs of refugees multiply. This year Bernard has been preoccupied, first by East Timor, and then by the vast number of people affected by Cyclone Nargis in Burma. Early on he heard from witnesses the scale of the disaster and the heroism of ordinary people. They also spoke of their gratitude. One wrote, ‘After two months, a sense of gratitude and fulfillment fills all of us. We were there to rescue them, feed them in the first weeks and console them in their moments of darkness. We are moved to tears when we see people back again in their fields. We walked with them in their moment of brokenness. We broke bread with them in their villages without homes and churches.

With the support of all of you (friends and partners), we are resolute to make their lives more dignified through greater livelihood options, decent living quarters while charting a hopeful future for their children.

The deluge brought daring challenges but our people’s resilience is the greatest asset and reward. As each one of you contributed towards making this happen, a sweet debt we owe to all of you.’

In the aftermath of the cyclone international agencies had little scope to help build the more hopeful future. JRS supported Burmese who worked with the survivors of the hurricane. It helped them with technical advice, encouragement and some financial support.

‘People without title to land have been forced to live in areas vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters. The poor, who were officially ‘squatters’ for generations, were the worst victims in the disaster.’

The Myanmar Rehabilitation Initiative was able to help 150 poor families rebuild their simple houses. This is a little thing in so enormous a need. But for Bernard, it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

‘Homelessness has emerged as one of the major problems after Nargis’, Bernard says.

They also taught Jesuits there to see freshly their Ignatian inheritance. Jesuits saw clearly how community can be formed and nurtured. They saw the international reach of the Society. They saw how important it is to experience deeply and to reflect on what they experienced.

For some Jesuits it was a return to their noviceship experiments. They had to keep the pilgrims fed. Early in the morning they prepared breakfast for the 1200 pilgrims. Into each pilgrim’s breakfast bag they put two sugar sachets, a coffee sachet, two tea bags, a packet of breakfast cereal, a bottle of milk, two marsh bars, two bread rolls, butter, jam and pieces of fruit. In the afternoon they returned to prepare the dinner.

As World Youth Day followed MAGiS, the pilgrims’ enthusiasm at being with Pope Benedict was striking. They saw him as the symbol of faith shared with their brothers and sisters from around the world. For Jesuits this echoed the way General Congregation 35 spoke of the close bond between Pope and Society.

Living MAGiS

What Jesuits learned from the pilgrims

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Jesuits who came to MAGiS to help young people enter the Ignatian spirit of discernment and service found themselves helped by their young companions to enter it more deeply.
“The Vigil at Randwick before the Final WYD Mass was great. Everyone looked after each other so well through the night.’

“At the end, every time we do the MAGis Circle and everyone shares their joy and their struggle, it’s the answer. Everyone feels the same and the bonding is there.’

“Going to hear the Pope was really cool. When I saw the huge crowd, I realised what such different people had in common.’

Photos by Jesuit photographers and Beth Doherty
The event showed freshly what was possible in youth ministry. Pilgrims enjoyed one another’s company and found support in each other’s faith. They were also enriched by their differences of language and culture. The Jesuits working with them were also enriched by being able to enter practices that they might have thought had nothing to say to their own young adults.

The immediate task after World Youth Day will be to build on the energy and deepening of spirit with which the pilgrims will return to their homes. In our Assistancy, many Jesuits have prepared for that in university chaplaincies, parish groups for young adults, and in other organisations. Reunions have been organised, and review of the programs offered.

It is hoped that the Jesuits can continue to meet, too. The experiments, so central in the formation that MAGiS offers to young adults, will continue to involve Jesuits of different Provinces. And MAGiS is now organising internationally, with a meeting in Kenya next year.

The novices challenged me, because I had a strong desire to help them to grow. And of course that made me ask how I could be helped to grow. So I decided to look at spirituality, not so much for others as for myself, to see how to grow’, he says.

The novices are about growing, and making Ignatius’ spirit part of ourselves, he says.

Why not look at Ignatius?

Fr Budi Gomulia became interested in St Ignatius in the noviceship. Not so much his own time as a novice, but his years assisting the Indonesian Novice Master.

‘If I want to know how to grow, why not look at Ignatius?’

Budi came to Australia to study Ignatian spirituality and had to write a thesis as part of his degree. So an idea came to him.

‘If I want to know how to grow, why not look at Ignatius? After all, he was transformed from a self-centred person to one totally given to God and to other people in a relatively short time. How did this happen? How can we help one another effectively to grow?’

So Budi looked at Ignatius’ autobiography, at the Spiritual Exercises and at his letters.

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Budi says that our culture is one of self-fulfilment. So we don’t easily speak of self-denial or mortification. But he says it is important in helping those we guide to grow. If someone has a difficult relationship with their father, for example, we can simply listen to them. But it will be more effective if we help them reflect on themselves and help them find something they can do to conquer their resentment. Perhaps, to make something nice for their father each night and bring it to him.

‘That is proper mortification’, says Budi. ‘It comes out of reflecting on ourselves and it takes us out of ourselves to look at others. Ignatius would say it is about mission.’

Budi waits to see what he will be asked to do when he returns to Indonesia. But he would be very happy to work with novices in the Assistancy where there are so many needs. ‘Novitiates are about growing, and making Ignatius’ spirit part of ourselves’, he says.

He found there a secret that surprised him a little.

‘Throughout his life Ignatius practised a proper mortification. He is always speaking of it, always recommending it’, Budi says.

People ask him, ‘Isn’t that a very negative way of looking at Ignatius? Don’t harsh penances and an emphasis on correcting faults make you self-centred?’ Budi smiles and says that is why he insisted on ‘proper mortification’.

‘At first Ignatius practised dangerous mortification. But then he came to know himself better. He constantly reflected prayerfully on his life and saw exactly where he needed to conquer himself. ‘Conquering yourself’ is Ignatius’ favourite phrase. Francis Xavier used it too. When asked why, he said he had learned it from Ignatius. It’s about finding activities that will help us to grow where we need to grow.’
Sharing our Good News

In Ignatius’ day it was the printing press. Afterwards, telephone, camera, radio, film, television, tape, fax, video, internet, iPods and versatile mobile phones have been the latest thing in communication.

Technologies may change but Jesuits still need to communicate the Good News to the world and to share their lives with one another. These two things go together. General Congregation 35 insisted that Jesuits must reach beyond province boundaries in our mission to spread God’s word. We can only do that if we learn to communicate easily and effectively with one another. Here are some examples of how we communicate in the Assistancy.

The best ways of communicating are often the smallest: conversation, emails, blogs and parish newsletters, for example. In our region we often learn what our fellow Jesuits are doing through newsletters, like the Philippine Clipper, Inter Noi and China News.

Some Provinces also produce magazines for friends and benefactors and to promote vocations. Jesuits of East Asia and Oceania and the Australian Province’s Companions are examples.

Websites now present the public face of Provinces and our works. The Assistancy websites offer a rich picture of Jesuit life in our region and the different ways in which we share the Gospel. They publicise news and coming events, and provide material for spiritual reflection. Most websites are works in progress. They have space for people to respond to what is on the website, for example, and can present audio or visual items. But the development of these resources remains a challenge.

Some websites are supported by regular email newsletters. The EAO News from the Jesuit Conference goes mainly to Jesuits, for example. In Australia, Province Express offers Jesuit news and reflection to Jesuit benefactors and friends.

Communicating the Gospel

In communicating the Gospel, the printed word remains important within the Assistancy. Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines publish many books. Indonesia, is also typical of the Assistancy in the variety of magazines for which Jesuits have responsibility. Hidup, the Catholic magazine distributed throughout Indonesia, has a Jesuit director. The Jesuit publishing house in Yogyakarta also publishes Bias, a cultural and philosophical magazine that appeals to an educated audience. Upesan for a lay audience, and Rohani, a magazine for religious.

Today websites and electronic news services complement magazines in encouraging reflection on faith. The success of Sacred Space shows how people hunger for good spiritual help. In our Assistancy, the Singapore website offers Sunday homilies. The Singapore and Philippines websites also contain much spiritual material. Enoha Street and E Roslat offer cultural and social content from a Catholic moral perspective.

When evangelising people who do not read easily, audio and visual media have always been important. Jesuits in Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan developed these resources early on. The Kiangchi Cultural Press was founded in 1957 as a publishing house. It now also produces radio and television programs on faith and Christian values. Jerry Martinson, known in China as Uncle Jerry through his popular programs, is director.

Like Kiangchi, the Paskat Audio Visual Studio in Indonesia trains people in communications. In its programs it has recently focused on the relations between religions. The Jesuit Communications Foundation in the Philippines produces printed material and DVDs. Those featuring Jesuit church musicians have been very popular.

Building good communications

As Provinces increasingly share their resources more in projects that extend beyond their boundaries, good communications will become more important. Jesuits in Communications in East Asia and Oceania (JESCOME) has been responsible for encouraging more effective ways of communicating. It has been particularly effective in educating scholastics to know and use media.

The challenges to share Jesuit experience and resources within our Assistancy are posed first by the different languages we speak. A gift, but also a challenge to communicate.

Changes in technology provide us with constantly changing opportunities and challenges to communicate God’s word. Throughout Asia, many people rely heavily on mobile phones. Communication through text messages provides great opportunities, as the Philippines Province has shown. Audio and visual material suitable for phones will also become increasingly important.

Ignatius would blink when he saw today’s technology. But his eyes would have lit up at the possibilities it provided.
‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour’