A Jesuit University: Jesuits and Women

Exploring the Jesuit and Catholic dimensions of the university's mission

As one of its self-chosen tasks General Congregation 34 set out to clarify how the Jesuit mission is strengthened by women and to expand on the precedent set by General Congregation 33. The resulting document, "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society," calls for Jesuits to "align themselves in solidarity" with women and acknowledges courageous steps taken by positive reformers in the women's movement.

This solidarity manifests itself in ministry of all types, but is crucially at work in Catholic higher education. Here, against the background of history, post-Enlightenment pluralism, and twentieth-century humanitarian reform, feminist thinkers and theologians work to clarify the roles of women and the Church. Some of the most insightful and fruitful dialogue comes from these grounds. In her article "Feminist and Catholic Values: the View from the Professional Schools," Mary Brabeck, affirms that the Jesuit mission and the project of feminism are compatible because of a commitment to justice. She argues that despite this commitment, justice is not necessarily partitioned equally, and women still become isolated in the academy.

Lisa Cahill, professor in Boston College's Theology Department identifies such problems at the interpersonal and institutional level in her article "Women and Men Working Together in Jesuit Institutions of Higher Learning." Noting that the Jesuit order has its history in structures that have oppressed women, she also sees a commitment to justice as the promise of improving partnership. She suggests that, because of their commitment to justice, Jesuits are in a ready position to create an educational environment that respects women.