

## An open letter to the administrative officers and trustees of Marquette University

Marquette University is facing serious challenges today from a confluence of events and societal developments. We, the Jesuits missioned to the University by the Society of Jesus, would like to offer our reflections and raise our concerns as we face the present inflection point in the history of the University.

In 1864, Marquette University was chartered, and the Articles of Incorporation granted the Jesuit representatives to “grant such honors and degrees in art, literature and science...” The Society of Jesus deeded control of the University, including sixty-four acres of land and all of the University-owned buildings upon it, to a largely lay board of trustees in 1970. On that occasion the Board contracted to maintain the “Jesuit orientation, sponsorship, and support of Marquette University” and agreed to the “implementation of Marquette University’s commitment to provide the instruments and conditions necessary for Jesuit educational and apostolic work at the University.” We think it would be helpful to lay out how, in our view, Jesuit educational and apostolic work at the University must be understood.

Initially, St Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits, invites us in the Spiritual Exercises to focus on what every Jesuit knows as the First Principle and Foundation: “We are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save our souls, and we are to make use of the things of this world insofar as they help us attain that end, and rid ourselves of them insofar as they hinder us.” As Jesuits, our approach must be to begin with the ends we wish to attain, and only after those ends are firmly grasped do we then consider means to attain them. Of course such a process is counter-intuitive and challenging to the dominant economic paradigms of our period in history. But this commitment must condition how we understand service as a trustee or administrative officer of Marquette University. In particular, it sets the University apart from other kinds of organizations. Marquette is not a business; rather, it is an apostolate of the Society of Jesus.

How might this understanding of Marquette as a Jesuit ministry manifest itself? At its fundamental level Marquette cannot simply figure out how much money it has and then decide where to spend it. Rather, it must articulate robust values rooted in the history of the Society of Jesus and in Marquette’s own founding documents. And after that, armed with a coherent vision, it can begin to figure out the fulfillment of its core values by undergoing a process of asking what resources we need to bring about those goals. We understand that some financial realignment is necessary, but our budgetary constraints cannot dilute what a Jesuit education demands.

In conversations among ourselves, the values that the Jesuits at Marquette University agree on are best expressed in a robust articulation of what we expect of a graduate of our University. If we are faithful to the Jesuit vision, our graduates should manifest the following characteristics. First, they should be well-grounded in and have an appreciation of physical, social, and spiritual reality. They must know about creation, the world in which we live, and how respect for this world and the flourishing of human life are interdependent. They must understand society, with a special concern for the poor among us, carefully interrogating those structural inequities which result in unequal burdens on those least able to bear the weight. They

must have a place to explore spirituality, an understanding of a reality that goes beyond what we can see and touch. In this regard, we want students who are alive with a faith that does justice. Our graduates need to recognize the corrosive effects of bias and strive to eliminate it from their dealings. They should appreciate the complexity of economic systems and work so that any inequality benefits the poorest among us. We must produce alumni who have a heart for those who suffer in this world, who are unafraid of asking the big questions whose answers are elusive and often intractable, who are willing to speak to the wider world. And undergirding all of these goals is a robust commitment to each student's acquiring rigorous analytical skills and the ability to communicate the findings of their investigations in clear, concise, and precise prose. To this end, a solid grounding in the humanities is indispensable.

Yes, this is a tall order, but the integrity of a comprehensive Jesuit education explains why our institutions have survived while others have failed. We face an unknown future, and we face it together. The Marquette Jesuit Community commits to being part of the solution as we strive to provide the best education that we can for our students, for our community, and for the world.

With prayers for our continued common work to make Marquette better,

MU Jesuit Community

---

Gregory J. O'Meara, S.J.  
Rector of the Jesuit Community  
and Associate Professor of Law,  
Marquette University