



Q & A

Fr. Bradley M. Schaeffer, SJ, is the rector of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology (WJST) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A Chicago native, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1967 after graduating from St. Ignatius College Prep. Fr. Schaeffer went on to earn a BA in theology and English from the University of Detroit, an MA in education in counseling from Boston College, and an MDiv from Loyola University Chicago. His ministry began in 1970 teaching religious studies at the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and has included serving as principal of St. Ignatius (1984–1989), provincial assistant for pastoral and social ministries and secondary education (1989–1991), and provincial of the Chicago Province (1991–1997).

From 1998 to 2006, Fr. Schaeffer served as President of the Washington, DC-based Jesuit Conference, which is the formal voice of the Society to the US Church, the Jesuit Curia in Rome, and other government and faith-based institutions worldwide. Fr. Schaeffer helped oversee the apostolic efforts of the Society through its ten provinces in the US, which include 28 Universities and colleges, 70 secondary and primary schools, 7 technical institutions, 1 seminary, 17 social apostolates, 138 Jesuit-staffed churches, 31 retreat houses, and 7 spiritual centers.

The SOCIETY *in the United* OF JESUS

interview by Jeremy Langford

Q As president of the Jesuit Conference, you've had a broad view of the Society of Jesus worldwide. What stands out most for you about the Order and the Church today?

A It's been a real gift to see the universal Church and the universal Society in this job. My travels have taken me places I never thought I'd go, and what I've seen is that the Society is in great shape. The past three Holy Fathers have asked us to pay attention to the intellectual life of the Church, to be out in the public square where the atheists, agnostics, and seekers gather. For the most part we do a great job, and we are good loyal men of the Church. God has graced us with a rich tradition and great men, so as long as we are humble and put our gifts at the service of the Church, God will work wonders. That's what I've seen time after time—in meetings between the provincials of Latin America and the US, East Asia and South Asia; in visits to Africa where the Church is alive in a remarkable way; in witnessing the works of our schools and remarkable efforts of organizations like the Jesuit Refugee Service; and in my daily work in Washington, DC, and regular travels to the Jesuit Curia in Rome.

Q What challenges does the Church face today, and how is the Society addressing them?

A The Church is a little nervous these days, but I don't think we need to be. I think Pope Benedict XVI will do a good job pulling us together. We need to be diverse while being unified, to be driven by a common mission: the gospel. We need the complementary passions of both Peter and Paul, Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier, Pedro Arrupe and Peter-Hans Kolvenbach.

In the face of the diminishing number of priests, the Society in the US is going through a strategic discernment process that will affect not only our ministry in this country but how we respond



States and Beyond

THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT OF THE JESUIT CONFERENCE REFLECTS ON HOW THE SOCIETY OF JESUS FUNCTIONS IN THE US AND WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

to the Fr. General's "apostolic preference" for Africa and China. By July 2007 we will announce the results of our discernment process, which will likely involve a reconfiguration of the existing 10 provinces in the US. We have to make these decisions before the General Congregation in January 2008 in Rome because right thereafter we will have a new Superior General and a turnover of five provincials who are scheduled to leave office. Key questions we are addressing include what does the Church need from the Jesuits right now in the US? How can we ensure that our Jesuit institutions remain Jesuit? How can we best partner with our lay and religious colleagues?

Q How important are lay partners to the mission of the Jesuits?

A Clearly partnership between Jesuits and lay people is extremely important. Jesuits know that we have to be Jesuits. Lay people don't want us to be lay people, they want us to be Jesuits who bring our unique training and perspectives to the table. Likewise, lay people have to be lay people. So we Jesuits and our lay partners have to be respectful of each other's vocations and work together to put our gifts at the service of the Church. I'm convinced, in all humility, that we may help model for the Church what this lay-clerical relationship might be at its best, what this Church of the laity is going to look like.

Q What has been your vision for the Jesuit Conference the past nine years you served as president? What have you enjoyed most about the job?

A When I was appointed president, my first priority was to organize the office, and I think we did that by creating a strong organizational chart, creating necessary positions, hiring the right people, and updating our equipment and use of technology. A second priority was to strengthen the office of the president. By collaborating with the Jesuit Curia and the provin-

cial, and looking at the needs of the Society worldwide and in the US, the president needs to be able to make decisions and help chart a course. In our upcoming General Congregation, the Society will look even more comprehensively at the issue of what decision-making power the president of the Conference should have.

A third priority was to increase the Conference's role as a voice of the Jesuits in the US and as an advocate for relevant causes. Early in my tenure, we looked very seriously at moving the offices closer to the middle of the country to make domestic and international travel easier. But upon further reflection, it became obvious that we needed to be in DC. The Conference is primarily a communications ministry; for example, we publish the *National Jesuit News* and run a website www.jesuit.org. But we want to become more of a platform to articulate the vision of the Society. Most recently we've issued statements on the rights of the unborn and on immigration policy.

Q What does the future hold for the Jesuit Conference and for you?

A I think the Conference has an excellent future. Fr. Tom Smolich, SJ, is a great choice to be president of the Conference, the staff there is excellent, the provincials across the nation are ready to make decisions, and we've gone through a detailed discernment process to ensure that the Society can serve its mission in these changing times. We know lay partners continue to be a vital part of the Jesuit mission moving forward.

I have been assigned to serve as rector of the Weston Jesuit School of Theology. This is an exciting time for Weston because it is reintegrating into Boston College. God has sent the Society great, great men and I look forward to helping prepare those in formation for ordination, working with the international students, creating a strong community life, and working with the faculty to recruit, especially young Jesuits, and make Weston the best it can be. It's neat to be with the younger guys who are giving their lives to the Society of Jesus and the Church to be priests in such a challenging time. So I feel blessed moving into my new role. ■