

# **Companions**

## **in the Ministry of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises**

### **— the Australian Organisation for Ignatian Spiritual Directors**

Eddie Mercieca, SJ

It is not easy for me who has never been in Australia to really communicate to you meaningful insights which respond to your particular reality. Still, my message from Rome may help you re-create perhaps a wider '*Composition of Place*' as Ignatius calls it, to feel deeper the sense of belonging and communion to hundreds of others in all continents – Jesuits, religious, lay women and men – striving to give the best of our ministry in the Ignatian Tradition. You are *Companions* "Friends in the Lord" to all these brothers and sisters with whom you share the deep common experience of the Spiritual Exercises and Ministry to the world today. This composition of place recreates our thrust, our inspiration and our way of proceeding; it reminds us to minister in communion and interdependence; it challenges the quality of our relationships and invites us to form and sustain each other.

Never before in the history of Ignatian Spirituality, have offers and demands being made within a big variety of by-products of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius been so widespread and so numerous. Some two hundred and fifty spirituality centres/retreat houses belong to the Society of Jesus alone. This without taking into consideration many other centres inspired in the Ignatian tradition run by religious and lay persons. I know of no country or at least region in the world where some kind of formation programme for Ignatian spiritual guides do not exist.

### **Why is this happening and what are the challenges?**

It is said that every five hundred years or so there is a radical paradigm shift in humanity's culture touching our way of perceiving, thinking, feeling and acting. It is what happened in Ignatius' time. It is what we are living today. Copernicus, the Protestant Reformation, Christopher Columbus are just symbols of what happened in Ignatius' time. Globalisation, secularisation, marginalisation may synthesise what is happening in our times. Ignatian spirituality was born and grew amidst huge cultural changes very similar in their dynamisms to what humanity experiences in our times. We perceive – and thank God many seekers of sense and life intuitively do the same – that the Spiritual Exercises come to be a big help in our struggle for Christian living and commitment today.

Two challenges come to my mind which have a lot to do with your Annual Conference of Companions in Australia: deepening our collaboration in mission and guaranteeing real Ignatian quality in our ministry of accompanying others.

Collaborative ministry is not just team work or creating the latest technological developments in our networking. It has to do with "Mission" being sent by the Lord, it relates to "Vocation and Identity". *The Trinitarian dynamism of unity and distinction* reverberates in us as partners sharing a common vision and mission.

Literally thousands of Jesuits, religious and laypersons are today accompanying others through the Spiritual Exercises or in spiritual accompaniment.

In this huge grace of the Lord, a subtle trap typical of the Second week of the Spiritual Exercises may be present. I refer to being content with this reaching out to so many thousands, but not taking enough care of the inner quality of our ministry. I am convinced that if we are not careful and serious in our formation and in the quality of our Ignatian ministries, in ten years time or so the house built on sand will fall down! It is a precious gift we have in our fragile hands. We need His Spirit to be faithful to the task of being good instruments as “Companions in Mission”.

May the Lord bless your conference this year when we Ignatians celebrate the Jubilees of Ignatius, Xavier and Faber. And may the way the Lord accompanied these three companions be for us model and inspiration of the way we accompany others.

Gratefully,

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