



Together, We Can Climb Mountains

The Ignatian Spirit of Mission and Partnership

by Fr. Edward W. Schmidt, SJ

In the Jesuit Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius established an elaborate system of communications whereby men “sent to bear fruit in the Lord’s field” wrote letters to their superiors, who in turn wrote to their provincials, who then wrote to the general. Accordingly, the early Jesuit missionaries sent countless letters back home. They wanted to tell superiors what they were up to and how they were succeeding. They wanted to share their adventures with family and friends. And they wanted to get others to join their mission as partners or even as young Jesuits.

Superiors in Europe published many of these “letters edifying and curious.” In the days before CNN and daily blogs and instant messaging, they were an immediate sensation. They drew vivid

pictures of men on mission in exotic places. Across oceans and beyond mountains, they kept people connected.

A collection of these letters published in Milan in the 1820s came enhanced with colored copper engravings that highlighted the wondrous and the heroic scenes the letters described. One of these engravings recently came my way and is featured here. It pictures eight missionaries at the start of a mountain path. The caption—quoting one of the letters—reads: “The ardor that brought them across the seas drew them to climb a lofty mountain.” These Jesuits form quite a group.



We don’t see much of the first man, up ahead of the others, bundle carried lightly under his arm.

Maybe he is young and has the energy to take the lead. Maybe he is so full of zeal for mission that he cannot wait. Maybe he just wants to get going.

Next comes a pair. One—an athlete, maybe, a weightlifter?—is bent under two bundles, but he charges on. Clearly he is a man on mission. His companion, comfortable under his pack, has a few words to say.

The next two share their burden. The one behind struggles for balance as his companion, already safely off the rock, braces to relieve him of his pack. Maybe the young man up ahead with two packs is carrying this man’s burden too.

Only one of the final three carries a pack;



Retreats

his feet are in motion as he looks up the path he has to climb. A venerable Jesuit points the way for him—could he be the superior who has sent these men out? And an older man folds his hands in prayer for his companions and their mission.



Some of these men are veterans—their white beards show us that. Others seem to be young. Perhaps only six of them are heading up this mountain while the others bless them on their way. But they are Jesuits together on mission, clearly identified in the imagery of the day by their black robes and those fantastic hats!

Partners is our edifying and curious letter, and here you see some of our men on mission. Kent Beausoleil and Michael Conley, full of energy and excitement for mission, assume the welcome burden of Catholic priesthood and set off on new paths. Fr. Terry Charlton is well up his mountain path with his school for AIDS orphans in Nairobi, Kenya. Two of our men have finished their mission here on earth and begin their new life in God's hands.

Mission gives energy to Jesuit life, and Jesuit partnership is a shared mission. The restlessness in Ignatius's *magis*, "more," is the drive to climb higher up the mountain if the Lord calls us on or even to find another mountain if we have finished with the first.

The upward climb that fills the life of each of us is easier when shared. The mission to bring Jesus to our world is not possible if we are not together. Companions on the road, partners on the way, we have to move ahead sharing burdens, holding on to each other for balance, direction, and blessing. And it is crucial too that we tell our stories. ■



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Chicago Province of the
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September 14–16

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September 28–30

Men's Silent Retreat

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Women's Silent Retreat

Led by Fr. Richard McGurn, SJ

October 9–11

Women's Midweek Retreat

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August 6

The Cross: The Mystery of Union and

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Sorrowful Mother/St. Joseph Retreat for

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John Ferone, SJ, and Michael Sparough, SJ, will be leading an Italian

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