

A 'way of proceeding' in spirit, heart, practice

By THOMAS CURRAN

During a recent alumni gathering, I was asked to enumerate the biggest challenges facing us. I paused for a moment. I was tempted to provide a litany of several major projects, especially since the gathering included individuals who could make significant contributions toward those projects. However, my response was, "Being faithful to our mission."

Rockhurst University, Kansas City, Mo.'s Jesuit university, will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2010. This milestone is significant for us. However, we are mere adolescents in the Jesuit tradition of higher education, which spans close to five centuries. In many respects, our relative youth gives us a unique perspective and opportunity. Additionally, the diminishing presence of members of the Society of Jesus is a contributing factor in our need and desire to be intentional about our identity as a Catholic, Jesuit university in the United States at this time.

I am in the fourth year of my tenure as president of Rockhurst University. As a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, an international religious congregation of priests and brothers, I am in a unique position as the first As a member of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, an international religious congregation of priests and brothers, I am in a unique position as the first non-Jesuit president of Rockhurst.

Since my arrival, I have requested our university community to perceive its work, current and planned, through the lens of our Ignatian-Jesuit identity. I contend this is accomplished by adherence to what is known as a "way of proceeding."

The articulation of this way is found especially in the writings of Jesuit Fr. Jerome Nadal. This early Jesuit characterized the "way" as a triad: spirit,



—Courtesy of Rockhurst University

Glenn Young, a visiting instructor of theology, receives Communion from Fr. Thomas Curran at Rockhurst University's annual Mass of the Holy Spirit Sept. 15.

within — from the heart of God to the heart of the individual. And the practice is the service component — doing something about the presence of the spirit and its transformation of the heart.

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At Rockhurst we use the triad of learning, leadership and service. Learning is the instruction of the intellect, leadership is the training of the will, and service is the formation of character.

In all 28 U.S. Jesuit universities and colleges there is an office dedicated to the way of proceeding. For us, this office is directed by Jesuit Fr. Kevin Cullen, vice president of mission and ministry. He is assisted by Jesuit Fr. John Vowells, rector of the Kansas City Jesuit community. This office provides the foundation upon which we place everything else. The hiring of person-

our mission and ministry. This approach is intentional and it ensures that we are both Catholic and Jesuit.

Yes, we have daily Mass, retreats, prayer groups, opportunities to experience the Spiritual Exercises, leave for mission-related activities, a pro-life group, and dozens of other such opportunity prayer groups, opportunities to experience the Spiritual Exercises, leave for mission-related activities, a pro-life group, and dozens of other such opportunities. However, no one activity or group defines us. Rather, the menu reflects examples in our way of proceeding.

Through all of these activities we adhere to six core Jesuit values:

- *Cura personalis* — care for the individual;

- *Magis* (more) — excellence in all endeavors to bring about the greater glory of God;

- contemplation in action — reflection leading to gratitude leading to ser-

ving the world.

Our way of proceeding ultimately guides us in how we engage one another, how we engage the world in which we live, and how we engage the intersection of faith, culture and science.

The religious environment for this way of proceeding is one of invitation versus expectation. We extend an invitation to each and every member of the Rockhurst University community to be aware of their interior transformation. The experience is never demanded.

So, how are we doing with this approach? One measure of our success is to look to our graduates. St. Francis de Sales, a product of Jesuit education, is someone whose response to this interior and lifelong transformation is very familiar to me. In addition to being educated by the Jesuits, Francis completed the Spiritual Exercises and retained a Jesuit as his spiritual director throughout his life. As with many graduates and people who experienced this invitation to an interior transformation, he responded fully.

I look to his example and countless others who embrace this way of proceeding.

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In fact, I now have a fuller understanding of why Francis de Sales said, "Lips speak to lips, but hearts speak to hearts." His comments reflect his Jesuit training and desire to follow a way of proceeding.

As a son of de Sales, a product of Jesuit education, and now president of a Jesuit university, what will be my response to future queries during alumni gatherings about the biggest challenges facing us? We must be faithful to our mission in a "way of proceeding" that consists of spirit, heart and practice.