





REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVING TRADITION

## How Jesuit Record Keeping Fuels Mission and Identity: A Conversation with David Miros

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### Introduction

The Jesuit archival tradition extends far beyond any single location, embodying a network of repositories across the globe that preserve the memory and engagement with the mission of the Society of Jesus. From the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) in Rome to provincial and institutional archives in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas, these centers serve as vital nodes in preserving the shared history and vision of the Jesuits. This interconnected system of archives reflects a foundational Jesuit principle: the integration of local and global perspectives for the greater glory of God. It is within this global framework that the Jesuit Archives & Research Center (JARC) in St. Louis, Missouri, plays its unique role in shaping the narrative of the Society of Jesus and its various apostolates.

Just three miles from the iconic Gateway Arch—a symbol of national identity that bridges the past and the future—the JARC stands as a through point for the mission of the Society in the United States, Canada, and beyond. Under the stewardship of David Miros, its director, the JARC preserves an invaluable repository of artifacts, historical records, and media that reflect the evolution of Jesuit ministries, particularly in the United States. To better understand how archival work connects to Jesuit identity and serves as a means of imagining the future of Jesuit educational institu-

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tions, we spoke with Miros about the significance of his work and the spirit that animates the JARC.

### **Record Keeping: A Jesuit Charism**

JARC serves as a central hub for American Jesuit source materials, including records from the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, which have been steadily enriched since its opening in April 2018.<sup>1</sup> Miros emphasizes that archival work is not merely about preserving history but about fostering a dynamic engagement with the past. He explains that archives serve as a bridge between memory and vision, offering resources to reflect on origins while informing the path forward. For Miros and the team at the JARC, the spirit of their mission can be encapsulated by the words attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907–91), “God has blessed this Society with an incomparable fund of documents which allow us to contemplate clearly our origins, our fundamental charism.” These words guide their work, underscoring the Jesuit conviction that record keeping and preservation are essential acts of faith, service, and imagination. Miros emphasizes that archives and records are not static collections but dynamic entities that embody the living spirit of an institution. They offer vital insights into the direction of the Society, the Church, and affiliated institutions. Through these resources, one can grasp the Society’s fundamental charism and its evolving mission.<sup>2</sup>

This lesser-known Jesuit charism of record keeping is rooted in the ideas and values of the founder himself. St. Ignatius valued good record keeping, in part, because this was an integral part of his family life and upbringing. When Ignatius was young, his father, Beltran de Loyola, sought to establish a legally secured family estate that could be efficiently passed

1 In 2014, as Jesuit Provinces in the United States continued to reconfigure since the 2000s, Miros was asked to house additional collections in St. Louis, which had previously been home to four past U.S. provinces: Wisconsin, Detroit, Chicago and Missouri. This called for the creation of a new facility that could accommodate the space necessary for what would become a centralized location for seventeen past and present province archives. The present province archives are made up of the East, Midwest, West, Central and Southern, and Jesuit Conference archives. JARC also houses the past province archives of New York, New England, Oregon, California, Buffalo, Chicago, Chicago-Detroit, Detroit, Maryland, Missouri, New Orleans, Oregon, and Wisconsin. The new facility was open to the public in April of 2018. Visit the JARC website to learn more: <https://jesuitarchives.org/about-us/>. See also “Jesuit Archives and Research Center: Engaging the Past, Animating the Future,” *Jesuits Central and Southern*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.jesuitscentralsouthern.org/stories/jesuit-archives-research-center-engaging-the-past-animating-the-future/>.

2 Interview with David Miros on June 14, 2024.

down to future generations. Achieving this goal required an extensive effort to document and verify ownership—a task in which Ignatius frequently assisted. He later received formal training as a clerk, learning to maintain financial books and records for the treasurer of Castille, and carried these skills into his ministry.<sup>3</sup>

St. Ignatius also applied these record-keeping skills to mission communications, which served as evidence of the orthodoxy of Jesuit preaching in the event of accusations of heresy. These letters became a unifying force for the Jesuit mission, ensuring consistent communication between missions and, perhaps most importantly, preserving this correspondence over time. Despite evolving modes of communication, this work remains a cornerstone of the Jesuit mission today. Miros notes that the long-standing tradition of record keeping not only provides a valuable resource for reflection but also establishes a clear expectation of what must be done to continue the legacy of the Society of Jesus.

### **Cultivating a Narrative Identity**

While much historical patrimony of the Society of Jesus in the United States lies in the heart of St. Louis, a good amount is preserved in educational institutions across the country. These are the schools, colleges, and universities which strive to preserve, understand, and provide access to their own

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3 Ignatius's family aimed to establish a secured family estate so that all their holdings would be passed on to the next heir as one inheritance. This required the assembly of all records which proved ownership of each element of the estate. Ignatius grew up around his family's communal pursuit of this goal and would have been expected to do what he could to help make it happen. Because of this experience, he was given the opportunity to work as a clerk for the treasurer of Castille, one of his relatives. During this time, he learned how to keep books and records professionally. These skill sets served him well later in life when he faced many trials and accusations of heresies amidst the Church's anxiety surrounding the teaching of the Alumbrados. He had many legal cases brought against him and he learned the importance of proving the Church's approval of his teaching by carrying the various statements of innocence he accumulated from the trials. In a sense, Ignatius was bred into an archival mentality and the circumstances of preaching during the Reformation only served to strengthen this mentality. It is clear to see how this skill set might have served a group of missionary preachers and teachers well during a time of doctrinal questioning. Ignatius instilled this same archival mentality in the men he sent across the world, understanding the need for a historical record of missionary work.

I'm grateful to my colleague Fr. Bob Gerlich, S.J., who helped to provide insight into the archival mentality and upbringing of Ignatius and for allowing us to read an excerpt of his forthcoming English translation of Enrique García Hernán's *Ignacio de Loyola* (Madrid: Taurus, 2013).

histories using the work of archivists. In a sea of documents, photographs, maps, plans, and other materials, archivists work with others to perform the essential task of sorting, cataloging, and interpreting the past, ensuring that it is not only preserved but also understood. Yet, archival work is not solely about looking back—it inherently involves imagining the future. By cultivating an understanding of institutional history, archivists develop a keen sense for what might hold value for future generations. One of the guiding questions is this: what are the events, decisions, and artifacts of today that will help future communities understand their origins and evolution? Miros asks a similar question of his archival work, “How do we tell a story about how we got here?” In part, the answer can be found in the small and often hidden stories which deserve to be mined from history and preserved in the archive. Archival work, then, becomes a puzzle in which an institution attempts to piece together an identity.

First and foremost, the articulation of a narrative helps the institution to drive forward a mission which has been passed on by those who came before. Achieving this requires each school to engage in a conversation with its past, allowing it to discuss the future with the wisdom of tradition while innovating to meet present needs. Miros describes this exercise as a spiritually reflective process, emphasizing that looking back informs an understanding of who we are today. While the past does not bind us, it shapes our identity and mission. He highlights the essential role of archivists in this process, serving as a resource for administrators, faculty, and students who draw on archival materials to craft a story about their identity and history. Without an archivist, institutions may find themselves struggling to locate critical information or articulate a cohesive narrative about their journey and purpose.<sup>4</sup>

Archival work is born of a freedom of observation. This work occurs when one is free to truly examine the past, to be open to how that past speaks through and expands our present paradigms and questions, and to appreciate how it shapes a present institutional identity and narrative. Through that, leaders are better equipped to make decisions that honor tradition while embracing the necessity of innovation.<sup>5</sup> As Jesuit institu-

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4 Interview with David Miros on June 14, 2024.

5 I’m reminded here of the work of Greg Jones, who has coined the term ‘traditioned innovation,’ whereby he argues that the past and future are held in tension, not in opposition, and is crucial to the growth and vitality of an institution that is rooted in such a tradition. See Andrew P. Hogue and L. Gregory Jones, *Navigating the Future: Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021).

In addition, there has been much written on the Jesuit value of accommodation and the necessity to adapt to the present cultures and circumstances. See

tions journey into the future, they must first uncover the roots of the past, observe how its fruits are bearing out in the present, and how they might be cultivated for a better future.

### **Storytelling as an Invitation to Greater Participation**

On a practical level, Miros highlights the value of archival work for marketing, advancement, and fostering alumni engagement. He emphasizes that knowing who we are and what we have accomplished is invaluable for educational institutions in communicating their narrative. For instance, showcasing historical records, such as reels of a 1960s football team when building a new stadium, helps to connect the past with the present. Archival work not only preserves such materials but also supports mission partners in recognizing their role within the broader story of Jesuit education. By maintaining a strong records program, archivists make it easier to collect, conserve, and use these materials over the long term. This, in turn, unites mission partners in understanding the history of an institution and invites them to see themselves as co-authors of the current chapter in a narrative built on the legacy of those who came before.

Archival work opens us up to new opportunities to celebrate the triumphant moments in our histories, whether that be related to academics, athletics, spirituality, foundations, or the recognition of the evolution of the mission. Archival work has been responsible for the celebration of centennials, and the inclusion of past educators, students and supporters. These events serve to create a stronger institutional identity in the present moment by rooting the community who remembers them in an experience of the past. They also serve as greater connective tissues within the broader Jesuit educational network, fostering a sense of belonging and unifying schools under a shared origin and mission.

At the same time, when looking at the past, it may happen that we find things we would rather not see. Instead of turning a blind eye, archival work asks institutions to take a closer look, to face the complexity of the past for the sake of the present and future. In this sense, archival work has at its heart, a reflective quality which mirrors the Jesuit practice of the Examen.<sup>6</sup> At the institutional level, it is important to evaluate institutional

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for example Stefania Tutino, "Jesuit Accommodation, Dissimulation, Mental Reservation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, Oxford Handbooks, edited by Ines G. Županov (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190639631.013.10>.

6 In 2021, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States published their document *Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education: A Guide for Mission Reflection*, which revised the 2013 document, *Some Characteristics of*

responses across time. This involves recognizing positive responses to the invitation to mission as well as the ways that mission may have been neglected in the interest of things which conflict with the original life of these institutions.<sup>7</sup> By opening history with a desire for infusing the present with new life, archivists can serve to provide appropriate methods to evaluate the past comprehensively and effectively for the future.

### From Reflection to Imagination

Schools are increasingly recognizing the value of archival work as a way to understand and engage with the story of the institutions and communities in which they operate.<sup>8</sup> This practice not only preserves history but also

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*Jesuit Colleges and Universities*, where the practice of the Mission Priority Examen (MPE) was introduced. The 2021 document suggests that “recognition of an institution as a Jesuit college or university does not rely on the presence of Jesuits on campus, but rather on the demonstrated commitment of these institutions to live out their Jesuit mission and values in ways that are real, enduring, and grounded in a well-prepared community of leaders personally dedicated to an Ignatian vision” (2). This reflective practice asks institutions to ask questions such as, “How successful have efforts been to understand the institution’s own history around race and race relations?,” (19) pointing to the importance of the engagement with an institution’s history for its alignment with the Jesuit mission and identity. See Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, *Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education: A Guide for Mission Reflection* (2021), retrieved from <https://ajcunet.edu/ajcu-document-library/>.

- 7 In the early 1900s, Jesuits in the mission schools in the United States, building upon Pope Leo XIII’s Encyclical *Spectata Fides* (1885), promoted the idea of carrying the ‘spirit of the missions’ within all Jesuit educational institutions. Editors of the periodical, *Jesuit Missions*, articulated this ‘spirit’ in its framing of Christianity: “It is necessary not only that mission instruction be given to the young at certain fixed times, but also that every other subject taught be permeated with mission zeal. If this is wanting, if this unselfish atmosphere does not pervade and warm the hearts of teacher and pupils alike, little apostolic good can be expected from any kind of learning...” See Maryland-New York Province, “The School—The Missions,” *Jesuit Missions* 7, no. 8 (1933): 182; See also Leo XIII, *Spectata Fides* [Encyclical Letter on Christian Education], The Holy See, November 27, 1885.

Within the Jesuit educational discourse in the United States as seen in the *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*, the term ‘mission’ would not be utilized more widely to denote a spirit of a shared institutional purpose until the 1960s.

- 8 There is a growing number of archivists and archival collections at Jesuit high schools in the United States. Some longer standing Jesuit high schools share continuing histories with Jesuit colleges. However, there are many Jesuit schools that do not, or in the case of St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, the high school remained in the original location with the college moving to a new location, leaving the school with many of the original documents and artifacts.

honors the Jesuit charism of archiving, calling institutions to more deeply engage with the living tradition of Jesuit education and history. By cultivating, articulating, and rearticulating their narratives, schools strengthen the connections that bind them to other Jesuit institutions worldwide. Miros highlights the unique role of schools in this network, emphasizing that their participation in the educational apostolate situates them at the heart of the Jesuit tradition. He notes that when high school archivists see themselves as part of this broader tradition and family, they can bring greater vitality to their schools and foster a deeper sense of connection within the Jesuit community.<sup>9</sup>

The Jesuit charism understands the value of being willing to go where one is called, but at the same time, it is a charism which calls us to a particular remembrance for the places and communities which formed the past. Miros reflects on Jesuit spirituality and its compatibility with the archival mentality when he considers the expression, ‘a Jesuit’s home is the road.’<sup>10</sup> He says, “There is a lot of truth to that expression, and we see it reflected in the documents we house. There is a willingness to go where one is being missioned to, and it requires a certain internal freedom of a person to be willing to say yes to what their superior or provincial might be asking them to do.” This ‘yes’ to mission is born of a deeper connectivity to the network of shared responsiveness to the Jesuit mission. In responding openly to the call to mission and to education, Jesuit institutions paradoxically find a deeper sense of connectivity through a sense of shared mission with those who are responding to the same call throughout the world. Archival work is the thread that weaves together the rich narrative of the Jesuit tradition, bringing it to life for the inspiration and encouragement of traditioned in-

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While many schools have had voluntary archivists in the past, there is an increasing attention to dedicate space, resources, and staffing for the preservation and exploration of such materials. St. Xavier High School, for example, dedicated a part-time paid position to the archives in 2019 and then created a full-time position as director of the archives in 2021.

9 Interview with David Miros on June 14, 2024.

10 The original phrasing alludes to sayings from Jerónimo Nadal, S.J. (1507–80), who was pivotal in cultivating the early Society of Jesus. It was thanks to Nadal that Ignatius agreed to have his spiritual autobiography written and that the spirit and letter of the Constitutions were spread among the first generation of Jesuits, using expressions like ‘we are not monks,’ ‘the world is our home,’ and a call to ‘be a contemplative in action.’ In 1561, Nadal wrote, “Ay misiones, que es por todo el mundo, y es nuestra casa. Donde ay necesidad o más utilidad de nuestros ministerios, aí es nuestra casa.” See *Epistolae et Monumenta P. Hieronymi Nadal*, Volume 5: *Comentarii de Instituto Societatis Iesu* (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1962), 469–70.

novation, inviting every student, educator, missionary, administrator, and supporter to carry forward the story of the Jesuit mission in education.

**Further Reading:**

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