

**Current Jesuit Conversations and the Invitation to  
Partnership in Mission: Heartland/Delta  
Marquette University  
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“Another thing that I found very helpful and I hope it can be applied to the whole Society is the desire in our Assistancy for more transparency across the provinces” (Adolfo Nicolás, at GC 35).

I would like to use this lens of transparency and the call Adolfo Nicolás has made to the whole Society to give shape to these brief remarks. I would like to do three things:

1. Give some background to and some highlights of GC 35 from my vantage – and only in the sense of this theme and call of a transparency that is an invitation to genuine partnership in ministry.
2. Speak of the Congregation’s documents, especially Decree Six, “Collaboration at the Heart of Mission” – again briefly – to see how they might help us become more transparent with each other, more engaged in partnership in mission.
3. Answer any questions you may have or clarify where I have been opaque and not transparent.

First, then, the background. A General Congregation is a rare event and more often than not it is called when the General Superior dies and elects a new Superior General for the Society of Jesus. In the 469 year history of the Society there have been only thirty-five such Congregations.

Sometimes, as in the case of GC’s 32 and 33, the Society gathers to discuss and decide upon “matters of greater moment.” GC 35 did both. We elected Adolfo Nicolás and wrote six documents that set the tone and the course for the Jesuits’ engagement with our collaborators and the world. In addition, the 227 delegates and electors entrusted a number of topics and issues to the ordinary governance of the Society. Important topics such as migrants and refugees, ecology, dialogue and religious fundamentalism, youth ministry, formation, Africa, China, the Roman universities and international houses,

Jesuit brothers, and community life were topics discussed at length and referred to Nicolás with suggestions and recommendations.

The six documents are –

1. “With Renewed Vigor and Zeal: The Society of Jesus Responds to the Invitation of the Holy Father”
2. “Identity: A Fire the Kindles Other Fires. Rediscovering Our Charism”
3. “Challenges for Our Mission Today: Sent to the Frontiers”
4. “Obedience in the Life of the Society”
5. “Governance at the Service of Universal Mission”
6. “Collaboration at the Heart of the Mission.”

The highlights of GC 35. Top among these, of course, is the election of Nicolás himself. The years preceding the Congregation, while difficult in some important ways, were important for restoring good relations with some bishops and certainly the Holy See. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach did this work masterfully. He built up the trust of the Holy See with the Society of Jesus. It was an open secret that the Society had fallen in the estimation of John Paul II. Even now, some of the leadership in the offices of the Roman Curia believes the Society of Jesus is disloyal.

From 1820 to 1965, the General Congregations were largely legislative assemblies; the last four GC’s broke with that trend, though they did all legislate and guide. Four matters stand out as concerns of GC 31, 32, [33 – Arrupe resigns, Kolvenbach elected] 34, and 35 –

1. The preservation and health of the Society of Jesus;
2. Formation within the Society of Jesus;
3. Choice of and Renewal of Apostolates by the Society of Jesus; and
4. The Internal Governance of the Society, especially General Congregations.

GC 35 was in the model of the last four GC’s: It was the most transparent and collaborative to date. Moreover, for the first time in Jesuit history, the number of delegates from Europe and North America was less than the number from Asia.

Still, the conversation in the Aula (large meeting room) before the *murmuratio* included a touchy topic – who is electable and who is not. We had been quietly prepared for Cardinal Rodé’s homily at the Mass which officially opened the Congregation. Rodé is Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We were told later, after the Mass, that the Holy See asked Rodé to tone down the discourse and only set a tone of fraternal concern for the good of the Society and the Church the Society serves. We had expected something more severe.

In the Aula, just a few days before the *murmuratio*, one of the wags in the house asked the secretary if the Holy See had any reservations about who may be elected Superior General. It was code language asking if anyone had been blackballed. The Holy Father has prior censorship and that right has been exercised before. In addition, the Holy Father must be called immediately after the election of a new Superior General and the Congregation must await his blessing on our choice in the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Father does not give his blessing, we don’t leave the room and must begin the process again.

So, there was a lot at stake. After a pause, the secretary asked Father Kolvenbach, now resigned and seated in the body of the Aula, not at the head table, to speak to the issue. Kolvenbach’s response was clear and precise, without a wasted word – no one was surprised by his manner – but all were taken aback by the content. “The Holy Father has given us no reservation.”

Honestly, you could have heard a pin drop on the carpet. It was clear that Nicolás was now electable! The *murmuratio* began... and you know the results very well.

If there is a Jesuit in the world that articulates the growth of the Society in embrace of the method and tone of inclusivity, transparency, and partnership in mission, it is Adolfo Nicolás. But Nicolás had been rejected by John Paul II as the proposed rector or president of the Gregorian University in Rome just a few years earlier. The reasoning is byzantine but it amounts to this: The Japanese Conference of Catholic Bishops asked then Adolfo to translate their response to the Holy See to questions asked about evangelization in a non-Christian country, some ecclesiological and Christological questions. Adolfo warned the bishops that because he is a Jesuit the prefects of the necessary Roman Congregations might not appreciate this help. However,

the bishops prevailed and Adolfo translated the materials into “Vaticanese.” When the Holy See found trouble with the Japanese bishops’ positions, it was pointed out that Adolfo had been the translator. He was subsequently denied the rectorship at the Gregorian. Essentially, this blacklisted him for any higher office in the Society of Jesus and certainly as Superior General.

Turn back the clock for a moment to October 2007, when 30 US and some international delegates and electors met outside Boston, to prepare for this Congregation. We studied the work prepared by the *Coetus Praevius*, the committee of Jesuits from around the world which had to sort and select the petitions to the GC, the *De Statu* Report on the Society, and set the initial agenda for the GC. But the truth is we were a bit nervous.

- Who could be General? (Read the qualities! JC could not do it!)
- What do we do about the majority of Curial Cardinals who do not appreciate apostolic religious life in general and the Society in particular?
- What about the rapidly changing demographics of the Society? (This was the first time non-European and non-North Atlantic culture Jesuits did not form a bare majority! The largest single delegation was from India/South Asia.)
- What could be done about the growing gap of rich and poor in the world, the technological divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots,” and, more pointedly, even among Jesuit provinces?
- How could the Society be a help to all religious people with the rise of fundamentalism and the need for interreligious dialogue?
- How can we be more credible in the midst of bankrupt governmental and even Church structures, e.g., sex and financial crises?
- What about collaboration? Some important persons and elements within the Holy See don’t value it. What will the new General do?

In short, our October conversation was concerned with the credibility of the Society of Jesus in the Church and the world. We needed a Superior General who could be credible with the world, the world-wide Society, and the Holy See. We spoke of “good news”: the Society of Jesus has been “globalizing” since 1540. But we also spoke of “bad news”: Communication, finances, that oil-dependent economies have created a world-wide crisis and serious fear, a lack of confidence that is unprecedented. We have always known there are actually very few secrets in our communities; that tends to call the

best out of us, our caring, our honesty, our accountability measured with responsibility. We are now living in a world that has very few secrets and calls for the same response from the Church and the Society of Jesus – that is, fewer secrets, more truth-telling, more shared responsibility.

In addition, all over the world, even where the population of Jesuits is on the rise, collaboration, partnership in ministry, transparency and accountability are also on the rise. [PAUSE]

On the election day, January 19, 2008, it took two ballots. Nicolás was nearly elected on the first. Close to the end of the second ballot, Nicolás closed his eyes and put his hands in his lap and prayed...tears slowly rolling down his face.

As tradition would have it, after the Congregation's choice of Nicolás was given the papal blessing, he came down to the center aisle of the Aula, recited the Creed, the vow formula for those professed of four solemn vows, and then stood to embrace each of us and receive our fealty as our new General Superior. At the end of a long morning, Nicolás asked us to sit down and so we saw him receive all the staff – the women and men who serve the General Curia on a daily basis – cooks, cleaning personnel, secretaries, porters – they all came forward. He embraced and blessed each one; it was a clear signal that he does not forget anyone and he does not want us to forget anyone. This Superior General works with people and for people. He is a team builder; he does not forget or bypass people. He sees all of us as collaborators.

General Congregation 35 Documents: Focus – Changing Global Mission.

John Padberg, the eminent Jesuit historian at Saint Louis University, has said it well: GC 35 should be read as a “summing up and a deep breath so we can move forward.” The Congregation resoundingly affirmed the work of GC 31-34, especially the familiar phrasing of our missions today: “the service of faith and the promotion of justice,” the necessity of interreligious dialogue, and the need for collaboration – not simply with ourselves (other Jesuits) or with other Christians, but with all peoples.

In truth all six GC 35 documents presume and even speak to collaborative partnership. However, what is most remarkable is that the understanding of collaboration has expanded in two very significant ways:

1. Collaboration is NOT just with the “laity,” or Christian persons who are not ordained. Rather collaboration is with Christians, women and men of other religious traditions, persons of good will from all nations and cultures, and all who seek a more just world (GC 35, D. 6.3).
2. Collaboration is a partnership of equals, not a demographic to which Jesuits grudgingly acquiesce. There is a humility born of the realization that the best person for leadership as director of a Jesuit work, may well be a leader who is not a Jesuit.

While these notions were implicit in GC 34, they are explicit, transparent here.

#### A. Building on GC 34:

- We Jesuits around the world learned some things since GC 34 (1995). First, our partners in ministry, those who share our sense of mission and our passion to reach out to women and men of a broken and loveable world are “members of our own faith, people from other religious traditions, and women and men of good will from all nations and cultures” (GC 35, D 6.3). All of us are the People of God.
- We learned a humility that we Jesuits need to offer our gifts and receive the gifts of others – we must cooperate in others’ projects as well as invite others to cooperate in ours (GC 35, D 6.2).

#### B. Challenges since GC 34:

- Partnership in mission has been hampered in a number of ways – in some regions of the world because the participation by lay people in the local Church is minimal and not respected; in other regions because Christians are a minority; in other regions because the Ignatian charism, the dynamism of “experience, reflection, and action” for change and development is not known or valued.
- We also learned that in so-called technologically advanced regions, mass culture oppresses and distracts the vast majority of people; exaggerated individualism and consumerism encourage resistance to community and service found in our shared mission.

- Finally, some Jesuits around the world hesitate and even openly resist full partnership with persons of good will but different spiritualities. Certainly fear plays a role as does an exaggerated clericalism or traditionalism (GC 35, D 6.4).
- Yet the Society – world-wide – has acknowledged that we as a community are more ourselves and better for being in partnership and community with collaborators. More and more, Jesuits in formation are helped by lay Christians and persons of good will along this chosen path of life. This is fairly new around the world.

#### C. Orientations for Further Collaboration:

- Partners in mission have challenged the way Jesuits do their mission and that challenge has been a renewal of energy and focus in mission (GC 35, D6.8).
- So, those partners in Jesuit missions around the world ask:
  - (a) What constitutes a Jesuit work, and how might it be sustained with other than Jesuits in leadership?
  - (b) What are the necessary elements of formation needed by Jesuits and others to ensure growth in the spirit and practice of our mission?
  - (c) What bonds might appropriately unite us as collaborators in mission who seek to serve together, with deepening affection, the mission given to the Society?

#### D. The Nature of a Jesuit Work:

- The heart of an Ignatian work is the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. If a work therefore manifests the intentionality of seeking/finding God in all things, if it practices Ignatian discernment, if it engages careful analysis of context in dialogue with experience, evaluation through reflection for the sake of action, then the work is Ignatian.
- Moreover, an Ignatian work can be said to be Jesuit when there is also a clear and definitive relationship with the Society of Jesus and when its mission accords with that of the Society by a commitment to a faith that does justice through interreligious dialogue and creative engagement with culture. ***Could there be a more fertile ground for such partnership than in a Jesuit university?***

#### E. Formation for all (Partners and Jesuits) for Collaborative Mission:

- Recommendations to the whole Society include

- (a) The formation of Jesuits, from the earliest stages to ongoing formation throughout our lives, must include the experience of partnership and collaboration in ministry.
- (b) Likewise, there must be a formation for those with whom we minister so that they with us might deepen their understanding of the mission we share. Examples, the AJCU CADE Programs; the Ignatian Colleagues Program; and the Heartland-Delta Conference as well as the Western Conversations Group.
- (c) There is a sense from the GC as well that without arrogance we Jesuits should do more to be welcoming and invite partners in ministry to the *magis*, the more. “Respecting [each person and the] various levels of connection and understanding these programs invite each person – whether employee or volunteer, newly arrived or veteran, Christian believer or member of another faith community, or person without a religious affiliation – into a deeper awareness of his or her place in the Ignatian and Jesuit mission” GC 35, D 6.18).