

COLLABORATION AT THE HEART OF MISSION¹

Encouraging the dynamism initiated by GC34

1. When Jesus wanted to teach his disciples about the power of the word of God, which every Jesuit ministry proclaims, he began: “Listen! Imagine a sower going out to sow”.² He explained how some seed falls upon rocky ground, some among weeds, and other upon fertile soil where it yields a rich harvest. In his allocution to the members of GC 35, Pope Benedict XVI stressed the importance of the mission in which we are all engaged: “make the face of the Lord known to so many for whom it remains hidden or unrecognisable”.³ He told us that the Church needs the Society, counts on it to “reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach”.⁴

2. As men sent by the Vicar of Christ, we are led more and more to offer our gifts and to share with others the Good News of the Kingdom. Following the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council, the Society of Jesus has been transformed by a profound movement of the Spirit. Recognising this, GC 34 approved the decree, “Cooperation with the Laity in Mission”, that both affirmed and encouraged apostolic collaboration, calling on Jesuits to cooperate with others in their projects and in ours⁵. GC 35, reviewing our own life and service to the Church, and noting how the seeds which have been scattered through the inspiration of GC34 are yielding a harvest “thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold”,⁶ renews our commitment to apostolic collaboration and to a profound sharing of labour for the life of the Church and the transformation of the world.

3. We are humbled and grateful that so many—inspired as we have been by the vocation of Ignatius and the tradition of the Society—have chosen both to work with us and to share our sense of mission and our passion to reach out to the men and women of our broken but lovable world. We are enriched by members of our own faith, but also by people from other religious traditions, those women and men of good will from all nations and cultures, with whom we labour in seeking a more just world. Rich is the harvest. In many countries, important Jesuit works depend largely on the generous, loyal, and skilled collaboration of women and men of diverse religious and humanistic convictions. As the Holy Father affirmed our ministry and mission, saying to us, “The Church needs you”, we must in turn look to our collaborators in mission and say, with gratitude and affection, that the call we have received is a call shared by us together.

1 ‘Collaboration in mission’ is described in different ways in various languages across the Society: Ignatian apostolic partners, partnership in mission, companions, collaborators, co-workers, colleagues. The common aspiration is apostolic companionship based on discernment and oriented towards service. In this document, we have simply used the word ‘collaboration’.

2 Mark 4:3.

3 BENEDICT XVI, *Allocution to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (21 February 2008)*, §4 (Allocution).

4 *Allocution*, §2.

5 GC 34, D. 13, n.7.

6 Mark 4:8.

Challenges & Responses since GC34

4. Since GC 34 we have learned much. In some regions the development of collaboration has been limited because the participation of lay people in the local Church is minimal. In other regions, where Christians are in the minority, the challenge rests on bringing an awareness of the Ignatian charism to those whose spiritual experiences are often far different. Furthermore, in places oppressed by mass culture, the distractions of exaggerated individualism and consumerism have encouraged resistance to the powerful call of community and service found in our mission. Furthermore, our own uncertainty, born of the changing face of our ministries in a time of growing collaboration, has led to some hesitation and even resistance to a full engagement with the call of GC 34.

5. At the same time, the powerful spirit acknowledged and encouraged by GC 34 has not been idle, and for every challenge greater creativity and zeal have been the response. Numerous programmes of Ignatian formation have grown up around the world, adapted to various religious and cultural contexts. The foundational grace of the Spiritual Exercises is more widely available and provides a common language and experience, in which collaboration in mission is rooted and inspired. Increasing numbers of Jesuit works are directed by committed lay people, by other religious, and by diocesan clergy. The members of the Society — priests and brothers, those formed and those in formation — have a greater awareness of shared responsibility with others for the mission and ministry of the Society. Further, the Society has been enriched by our encounter with diverse communities of dialogue and cooperation. Lay and religious, women and men, indigenous persons and those of different religious and spiritual experiences: all these have changed us and nurtured in us a greater sense of the God “in whom we live and move and have our being”.⁷ The grace of these years is reflected in both more extensive and deeper apostolic collaboration, which places all—Jesuits and others—with the Son.

6. The seeds of mission sown by our collaboration have actually yielded a rich harvest, for the Ignatian charism serves not just the Society but the whole Church. We are aware of the contribution of this Ignatian charism in forming an apostolic laity, a development called for by the Vatican Council and identified by GC 34 as “a grace of our day and a hope for the future”.⁸

Orientations for Furthering Collaboration

7. While GC 34 recognized the Spirit’s movement and opened for us fresh avenues to implement our mission through more profound collaboration with the laity, the current Congregation recognizes the more diverse community of those with whom we have been called to share this common mission. The seeds sown by grace are growing in many ways and in many lands, and we wish to support this growth, while also indicating some other ways by which that growth might be fostered.

8. In this Decree we wish especially to reflect upon the way in which collaboration in mission calls us to a new and often challenging renewal of our ministries. This renewal demands that we address the following questions:

⁷ Acts 17:28.

⁸ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 29; GC 34, D. 13, n.1.

- 8.1 What constitutes a Jesuit work, and how might it be sustained with other than Jesuits in leadership?
- 8.2 What are the necessary elements of formation needed by Jesuits and others to ensure growth in the spirit and practice of our mission?
- 8.3 What bonds might appropriately unite us as collaborators in mission who seek to serve together, with deepening affection, the mission given to the Society?

What Constitutes and Sustains a Jesuit Work?

9. The heart of an Ignatian work is the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius. Indeed, any work may be said to be *Ignatian* when it manifests the Ignatian charism: i.e., when it intentionally *seeks God in all things*; when it practices Ignatian discernment; when it engages the world through a careful analysis of context, in dialogue with experience, evaluated through reflection, for the sake of action, and with openness, always, to evaluation. Such a work does not rely necessarily upon the Society of Jesus for its Ignatian identity, though it may affiliate with the Society in partnership through networks and other structures.

10. An *Ignatian* work can be said to be *Jesuit* when it has 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 a creative engagement with culture. In such a context, the mission of the work, whether administered by a Jesuit or by another who shares this commitment, will be “ultimately accountable to the General of the Society through appropriate lines of authority”.⁹

11. The leadership of a Jesuit work depends upon commitment for mission and can be exercised by Jesuits or by others. Such leaders must have a commitment to the mission of the Society as realized in the particular work, though they may be of religious or spiritual traditions different from our own. Clarity about the mission of each apostolic work and the respective roles of all parties prevents misunderstandings, promotes greater accountability, and builds teamwork. All those in leadership should understand and affirm these varied responsibilities in order to be better able to participate in the discernment and decision-making processes regarding matters of mission.

12. In developing a relationship between the Society and a Jesuit work, it is vital that Major Superiors engage and support those entrusted with leadership, whether Jesuit or other. Regular dialogue, conducted in a spirit of trust and with respect for appropriate subsidiarity, serves to promote discernment, accountability, and a clearer sense of collaboration for mission. Further, the Provincial or others should provide such leaders important information and directives from the wider Society of Jesus, thus encouraging a broader vision of mission and a better understanding of apostolic priorities and criteria.

13. The local Jesuit superior and local Jesuits do much to foster the connection between a Jesuit ministry and the Society. All Jesuits, but especially those assigned to a work, can help to foster a spirit of discernment and collaboration by their example and their willingness to share their lives with others. Likewise, our communities, as apostolic centres and not as mere residences, are called to explore how their hospitality may promote collaboration.

⁹ *Guidelines for the Relationship between the Superior and the Director of the Work*, 9, AR 22 (1996-2002) 385; *Instruction on the Administration of Goods*, 109-111.

14. Recommendations:

- a) We encourage Father General to revise the *Guidelines for the Relationship Between the Superior and the Director of the Work* to provide effective support for all those in positions of responsibility, whether Jesuit or others, and assist all parties in the understanding of their various roles and responsibilities. This document should recognize the multiplicity of contexts and give parameters that foster unity while allowing appropriate diversity.
- b) We encourage Major Superiors (and Conferences, where appropriate) to develop provincial or regional guidelines for endorsing and sponsoring Jesuit works.
- c) We encourage Major Superiors (and Conferences, where appropriate) to develop tools to evaluate the effectiveness of Jesuit ministries in accomplishing their mission.
- d) We encourage local Jesuit communities to explore ways of offering hospitality and support for the development of collaboration in mission.

What are the Elements of Formation for Collaborative Mission?

15. Collaboration in mission has resulted in abundant blessings for the apostolates and the Society of Jesus. Being with apostolic collaborators in mission encourages us to live more fully and authentically our Jesuit religious vocation. Ultimately, we bring to these relationships our own identity as men of the vows and of the Constitutions, men whose experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* has bound us to one another and to a particular “pathway to God”.¹⁰ In collaboration with others, in respectful dialogue and shared reflection, in labour alongside those similarly engaged who walk a different pathway, we come to know our own journey better and to follow it with new zeal and understanding.

16. From the earliest stages of Jesuit formation and throughout our lives as Jesuits, training in collaboration must be experiential, not only informing our understanding of ministry but molding our identity as men for others who are also men with others.¹¹ The vital role of collaboration for our way of proceeding as Jesuit ministers has implications for the content and methodology of formation as well as for the role of *formatores*.

17. Likewise, the importance of collaboration in mission means that all Jesuits, as men on mission, must also be men of collaboration. On-going formation in this area should be encouraged and supported within provinces and throughout Jesuit conferences. When undertaken together with collaborators, programs of professional development and spiritual enrichment can help us deepen our sense of common vision and our unity in mission.

18. The formation of Jesuits for collaboration, however, must be accompanied by a parallel formation of those with whom we minister, so that they might deepen their understanding of the mission they share with us. Diverse programs that respect and draw upon the wisdom and experience of the participants allow for a personal appropriation of the mission of the Society. Respecting various levels of connection and understanding, these programs invite each person—whether employee or volunteer, newly arrived or veteran,

¹⁰ *Exposcit Debitum* (1550), §3 (MHSI 63, 376).

¹¹ GC 34, D. 13, n. 4.

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.

19. Such formation should provide professional skills, develop a special understanding of Ignatian spirituality regarding mission, and include opportunities for growth in the interior life. Part VII of the Constitutions, the Complementary Norms, and the Autobiography of St. Ignatius provide important insights, although the Spiritual Exercises is always primary.

20. A final dimension of formation for mission involves programs of preparation and support for collaborators in leadership positions. All those in leadership positions have a special relationship with the Society of Jesus. Since their challenging work is important for the mission of the Society, they need ongoing support and care from the Society and one another. Furthermore, they should receive suitable formation in the distinctive dimensions of our way of proceeding, especially the integration of apostolic discernment in decision making.

21. Recommendations:

- a) We encourage Conferences and Assistancies to examine the program of Jesuit formation to ensure that all men in formation have appropriate experience of collaborative ministry.
- b) We encourage Major Superiors (and Conferences, where appropriate) to assist in the continuing development of opportunities and structures for the on-going formation of Jesuits in collaborative ministry.
- c) We encourage Major Superiors (and Conferences, where appropriate) to assist in the continuing development of opportunities and structures for the formation of others who collaborate in the mission of the Society.
- d) We encourage Major Superiors (and Conferences, where appropriate) to ensure the development of opportunities and structures for the appropriate formation of those in leadership positions in Jesuit ministries.

What Connections Might Make our Work More Fruitful?

22. As means of communication develop, the Society works more effectively as an international body and seeks synergies in service of its universal mission. Jesuits are often engaged beyond their province boundaries in national and international networks and in collaboration with a variety of persons, including other Jesuits. Some of these international networks such as Jesuit Refugee Service, Fe y Alegría, and the African Jesuit AIDS Network are works of the Society. Others are collaborative projects. In all such works, however, the good accomplished is multiplied by participation of the Society in collaboration with diverse parties united in a common mission.

23. GC 34 invited the Society to develop an “Ignatian Apostolic Network”¹² among persons and associations that share an Ignatian commitment to service in the Church. In those places in which the Society has responded zealously to this call, cooperation is growing in programs for formation as well as in the discernment, planning, and execution of common projects. These networks enable men and women with common concerns to share their experience and make use of their expertise. In this they realize the ever-widening possibilities

¹² GC 34, D. 13, n. 21.

of our networking. Moreover, the Ignatian tradition, when expressed by various voices—women and men, religious and lay, movements and institutions, communities and individuals—becomes more welcoming and more vigorous, capable of enriching the whole Church.

24. The Society desires strong relationships in mission with as many collaborators in the Lord's vineyard as possible. Those asking to be more closely linked with the mission of the Society¹³ normally come to this desire through an experience of the Spiritual Exercises.

25. Among the many different forms of collaboration, GC 34 considered a specific 'closer personal bond' between individuals and the Society, whereby a lay person could be missioned by a Provincial. This relationship implies mutual commitments by the Society and the individual.¹⁴ Sometimes called a 'juridical bond,' this manner of collaboration was authorized and recommended by GC 34 for an experimental period of 10 years, subject to evaluation by GC 35.

26. GC 35 affirms that this experiment was meant to be spiritual and mission focused,¹⁵ rather than legal or canonical. Over the last 13 years, the experience of this specific form of 'closer personal bond' has not been widespread in the Society, nor was there much demand for it. Some individuals became devoted to our common mission in this way, and they have contributed much to it. Occasionally, however, misperceptions arose as to what mutual expectations were, and collaborators without such a relationship wondered whether their manner of collaboration was somehow less valued than those with the 'closer personal bond'.

27. GC 35 acknowledges with sincere gratitude the contribution that has been made to the Society of Jesus and its mission by these experiences. However, after reviewing them, the Congregation concludes that it is preferable no longer to promote the special kind of spiritual bond which GC34 described in D.13, n.23-25. Those who already have entered into this closer personal bond with the Society should be able to continue in it as long as local provincials discern with them that it is the best way to proceed in mission. But this option for such a specific 'closer personal bond' should no longer be open to new candidates. As we continue to accompany those desiring to work in the mission of the Society, we can encourage them to live their vocation in one of the many ways of collaboration with which the Church has been blessed, especially since Vatican II has so clearly spelled out the mission of the laity in the Church. Among these are an increasing number of associations inspired by Ignatian spirituality.

28. We note with gratitude and joy the many autonomous associations with whom we share a spiritual bond, the fruit of which is greater and more effective service to the mission of Christ in the world. Among these, the Christian Life Community has roots that are deep in the charism and history of the Society. We wish to continue to support CLC in its journey towards ever greater apostolic effectiveness and collaboration with the Society. Likewise, other Ignatian groups, including Jesuit alumni/ae associations, various Jesuit volunteer organizations, the Apostleship of Prayer, the Eucharistic Youth Movement, and many others

13 Cf. Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., "*Concernant les laïcs associés*" (25 February 2003), AR 23,1 (2003) 102-103.

14 GC 34, D. 13, nn. 23-25.

15 This bond between the Society and the individual "is by its nature spiritual and apostolic, not legal". Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., "*Sobre la 'vinculación jurídica' de los laicos a la Compañía*" (17 March 1999), AR 22 (1996-2002) 530-533.

deserve our continued spiritual accompaniment as well as our support for their apostolic service.

29. Recommendations:

- a) We encourage the Society's government at all levels to explore means by which more effective networking might take place among all apostolic works associated with the Society of Jesus.
- b) We encourage the Society's government at all levels to explore with other communities of Ignatian inspiration, both religious and lay, ways to promote and support an "Ignatian Family" or "Ignatian Community" which will have a common vision of service, will promote networks of mutual support, and will foster new and closer forms of collaboration locally, regionally, and internationally.
- c) We encourage Superiors, especially Major Superiors, to seek ways to support and accompany CLC and other Ignatian inspired autonomous associations locally, regionally, and nationally.

Conclusion

30. In his day, St Ignatius gave shelter to the homeless of Rome, cared for prostitutes, and established homes for orphans. He sought collaborators and with them established organizations and networks to continue these and many other forms of service. To respond today to the pressing needs of our complex and fragile world, many hands are surely needed. Collaboration in mission is the way we respond to this situation: it expresses our true identity as members of the Church, the complementarity of our diverse calls to holiness,¹⁶ our mutual responsibility for the mission of Christ,¹⁷ our desire to join people of good will in the service of the human family, and the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is a grace given to us in this moment, one consistent with our Jesuit way of proceeding.

¹⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 12.

¹⁷ 1 Cor 12:12 ff.