

**TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY**

Dear Fathers and Brothers:

The Peace of Christ!

The Thirty-Fourth General Congregation recommended that I write a letter regarding practical aspects of vocation promotion, after studying the diverse experiences throughout the Society (D 10,4). The meeting held in Loyola, 21-25 July, to reflect upon vocation promotion and to discern what the Lord is asking of us, was very useful for acquiring more and better information on the present situation in the Society in this area and to discern concrete methods with which we can and should collaborate with the Lord to raise up vocations to the Society.

In agreement with the reports of the Delegates at the meeting in Loyola, today there exists more preoccupation regarding the lack of vocations than real interest in promoting them. At the present time in the Society there are only 23 full-time vocation promoters, few Provinces have teams and/or networks for support, and only nine have formal plans for vocation promotion, realized by a promoter with the help of a team and with the support of the Provincial. Although in almost all places there are activities to accompany those who are interested in the Society, only 22 Provinces have a pre-novitiate that is more or less institutionalized. In some parts there is a tendency to confuse or equate the accompaniment of candidates with vocation promotion.

The ministry of vocation promotion is crucial and determinant for the future of the Society and the services that it is called upon to offer in the Church. Vocations are a gift of God, but a gift conditioned upon our efforts to raise them up and discover them. I am convinced that the Lord is sending us vocations since the Church continues to express the desire to count upon the help of the Society. It is certain that there are "external" factors outside the Society (cultural, familial, social, and ecclesiastical) which do not enhance the evaluation of the consecrated life as a fulfilling option for young people from the human and Christian points of view. But we should also recognize that the Lord calls us to be more active and "aggressive," to make use of all the means and resources necessary to collaborate with grace in the raising up of vocations, following the example of St. Ignatius and continuing the tradition of the Society. For these reasons I ask the Major Superiors to consider the promotion of vocations as a real apostolic priority, clearly expressed in the apostolic provincial plans, and that they dedicate the personnel and material resources that are necessary. In addition, I am proposing to them some concrete measures to put this priority into practice.

Although it cannot be considered merely a strategy for obtaining vocations, a renewed and well-structured youth pastoral program is the best context for raising up and discovering them. The Spiritual Exercises as an experience of personal encounter with Christ who calls, along with

personal contact and spiritual accompaniment must be priorities in our ministry with young people. The life and mission of the Society in the future depend upon the youth of today. Therefore, I ask that we dedicate the best of our resources to reestablish contact with young people where we have lost it and to reenforce and better organize the contacts we already have.

But youth ministry is not enough. The explicit work of vocation promotion is also necessary, different also from the pre-novitiate programs and the accompaniment of those who are interested in the Society. In each Province or Region there should be a full-time vocation promoter or animator, who can count upon the real assistance of the Superiors and be capable of stimulating and discovering possible vocations. And in as much as the responsibility for vocations is with the apostolic body, the promoter should stir up and animate practical interest in vocations among all Jesuits and put into effect a plan of vocation promotion adapted to every concrete situation, that can involve in different ways the communities and apostolic works of the Province or Region and which does not a priori exclude any social group, culture, region, or forms of living and expressing faith.

We should be aware of the capacity and responsibility which all of us have to promote vocations, if we live out our vocation and mission with clarity, visibly, and unambiguously, as an apostolic body and not only as apostolic individuals. The lack of simplicity in our style of life, the inconsistencies in our way of living the vows, some postures suggesting disaffection for the hierarchy and ambiguities in respect to the Magisterium of the Church, little zeal and apostolic creativity, and lack of openness and community hospitality certainly play a role in the dramatic decrease in vocations in some parts of the Society. Candidates certainly do not expect to find ideal forms of life and perfect men. But they certainly desire and need support in the unfolding of their religious vocation in order to be men of prayer and community, in order to work in the mission of the Church and to assume and live ignatian spirituality with enthusiasm. For this reason I invite all of you to continue the discernment regarding what it is that the Lord is asking us to do to revitalize our community and apostolic life and in order to be transparent and visible signs as men consecrated to God and to our mission, as an apostolic body in the Church.

Vocations are promoted by means of prayer, of a clear presentation of our charism and mission, by personal contact with young people in the many areas of apostolic work, by inviting those who are interested in the Society to participate in our works and ministries, by making the Society, its mission and its saints, known by means of posters, books, videos, radio, television, and the internet. But these means by themselves are not enough. A personal relationship is required by which the vocation to the Society is proposed as a option for personal and Christian fulfillment.

Without having an obsessive preoccupation for the number, the vocation promoter must look for candidates of apostolic quality, with deep faith, healthy, well-balanced, with experience of God and of the sacramental life; who have faced and assimilated the dark aspects of their lives, their sexuality; young people who love the Church and believe in its renewal; with the intellectual capacity to complete the academic formation required for our apostolic mission.

Since a vocation is above all a gift of the Lord, I invite you to personal and community prayer for vocations, constant and consistent, according to the tradition of the Society.

In order to assess progress towards what has been established in this letter, I ask the Major Superiors that they inform me expressly and concretely in their *ex officio* letters of the decisions

and steps which they have taken to promote vocations in their Province or Region. May the Lord help us to discover what he is asking of us in order to collaborate with him to give us vocations and that He give us the will to accomplish it effectively.

Fraternally in the Lord,

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.  
Superior General

Rome, 29 September 1997