

A HISTORICAL AND IGNATIAN OVERVIEW OF JESUIT PARISH MINISTRY

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“Jesuit parishes...? Jesuits do not have parishes..! Jesuits run only universities and social institutes..!” Observations like these are not uncommon. Even worldwide, this impressionistic reading is very much present. But the reality is one of surprise..! Yes, Jesuits do have parishes..! Currently, Jesuit parishes have gone up, exceeding 2000. Besides these Jesuit parishes, many other parishes have one or more Jesuits on the staff. There is a huge contingent of over 3000 Jesuits today “labouring with the Good Shepherd” in parish ministry across the world. This number amounts to more than one sixth (17%) of the total Jesuit population that is active around in very many and myriad ministries. Moreover, indications are already available that this percentage would further shoot up..!

St. Ignatius might also be stunned to find so many Jesuit Pastors..! That is not where he wanted his men to be. Then, why now..? How come so many Jesuits are getting now engaged in parish ministry..? Does it mean that Jesuits have come to be unfaithful to Ignatius..? If still faithful, what have newly emerged in between his time and our time as far as parish ministry is concerned..? Further more, what is exactly expected of Jesuit parishes in the current post-Second Vatican Council scenario of the Church..? And, in the fast-changing globalized and post-modernism world of today..? (GC 35: Decree on Mission).

These and related enquiries could well be addressed to, by referring in some length to the three historical phases, so to say, of Jesuit Parish Ministry .

Phase one: Parish Ministry Discouraged

Ignatius, certainly, did not want Jesuits to be pastors of parishes. Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach commented on this as follows when he addressed the 1997 - Convention of Jesuit Pastors of South Asia (JEPASA): our Jesuit Constitutions in general are very broad and go to the very limit of being all inclusive in the list of works that the Society can and should accept. In fact, Ignatius established a list at the end of which he added, “ et alia ” to clearly indicate that the list did not exhaust all the possibilities of apostolic involvement. But when it came to parish ministry, the Constitutions are explicit and firm in stating that Jesuits should not take up any beneficed “curacy of souls” - cura animarum - in the canonical sense of the term.

Why this definitive exclusion of parish ministry..? Father Jerome Nadal liked to explain this exclusion by comparing the apostolic ministry of Paul with that of Peter. Paul was always on the move, that is, on Mission. And, accordingly, he was primarily and typically a missionary. Ignatius, faced with very many invitations for missions, wished Jesuits also to be missionaries. His concern was that the Society of Jesus had to be foundationally “an apostolic body” (GC 34: 543-545) ever ready and always available for new ministries and missions (GC 34 : 555 - 558).

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Nadal, in proclaiming the Constitutions, used to pose a question : “ Why are there Jesuits.. when there are diocesan priests and bishops..?” He himself would, then, proceed to answer it. Simply our charism, indeed our reason for existence, is that we might go where needs are not being met. Precisely, “our way of proceeding” encourages this mobility (MHSI - Nadal, V - II, p.113).

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Contrast this with the localized apostolic ministry of Peter who had to strengthen his brothers and sisters in faith. His ministry was mostly within the institutional structure of the Church. In a way, it was one of a stationary nature rather than being missionary. Both were and are necessary for the grace and growth of the Church. In his given context, in the mind of Ignatius, it was Paul who exemplified for us our ministry. In other words, the parishes belonged to Peter and the missions, to Paul. With all these data in mind, we could identify certain reasons to explain why Ignatius was not for parish ministry :

Parish ministry (earlier) went against mission - mobility.

Ignatius' time was an intense mission - time. Hence, Ignatius prized mobility for his men so that they could pack up and go off to meet new needs as and when they surfaced in the Church. A priest serving as a teacher or a social worker could untangle himself and move on as the occasion demanded. A Jesuit assigned as a pastor, on the other hand, would have to stay at the parish for the rest of his life. Going by the Church- Law of Ignatius' time, a priest was appointed pastor for life.

Parish ministry went against the form of religious poverty prescribed by Ignatius.

The assignment of a priest to parish ministry at that time permitted a personalized handling of the parish - money, house, land and properties. This conflicted with the Ignatius' version of the vow of poverty which precluded Jesuits having a guaranteed income.

Parish ministry went against the apostolic availability so as to reach out to the un- reached.

Ignatius saw the parishes already having somebody to care for them. Pastoral structures comprised the apostolic tasks and offices of the Pope, his collaborators, the bishops and the pastors of parishes all around. There was no need to feed the already fed.

Parish ministry also went against the Ignatian hall mark of "magis", due to its classical and traditional approaches.

Pastors of parishes normally cared for their faithful mainly through liturgical celebrations and the administration of the Sacraments. This was

also the common trend of that time emphasized by the Council of Trent (1547).

The Jesuits in fact, were not, neglecting the Sacramental ministry since the Spiritual Exercises already supposed the celebration of Sacraments especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. But, they also used the freedom that was available outside the parish ministry, to personalize the encounter with the Lord in the Sacraments, far from any kind of routine and formality. This provided an environment for “a magis -way of proceeding” in their ministries. For, in the fine words of GC 34, “the magis is not one among others in a list of Jesuit characteristics. It permeates them all. The entire life of Ignatius was a pilgrim search for creativity, the ever greater glory of God, the ever fuller service of our neighbour, the more universal good, and the more effective apostolic means.”

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All these perceptions and perspectives of Ignatius kept the parish ministry away, in order to be ever ready for new missions and new ministries where needed. Still, let us not forget the fact that Missions too enveloped lots of pastoral services including the so-called parish ministry. That would mean, Jesuits had inaugurated and maintained what we could now label as “Mission - Parishes” comprised of communities of far and near mission stations.

Phase two: Parish Ministry not discouraged

If the first phase could be defined as a time of “No” to parishes as such, the second phase could be one of “No and Yes”. A time of tolerance...! GC 31, on the 14th of November 1966, declared in principle that parish ministry was not incompatible with our Constitutions, because the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 65) had changed economic management of parishes and had made the parish clergy more mobile. However decree 27 (No 488-490) did not exactly encourage parish ministry. More than that, the decree

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stipulated that the General should have very strong reasons to approve any proposal of taking up a parish as a Jesuit Parish. The Provincials themselves cannot take decisions on this.

Still, the above not-so-encouraging stand of GC 31 regarding parishes was more favourable than the previous Congregation of Procurators. While

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addressing the Congregation of Procurators on 30th Sept. 1950, the then General Fr. J.B. Jansens had this to say on behalf of the Society : Our Institute was founded not to run parishes, but to offer some other ministries which involve the extraordinary care of souls and without which the Church is not able to fulfil fully her mission.(AR XI,873).

He, accordingly, ruled out the possibility of any change in our tradition to allow Jesuits to take up parishes.

GC 32, which took place in 1974-75, did receive some postulates on parish ministry, but it decided not to consider them. It did, however, just mention parish ministry as one among many other ministries when the Congregation insisted on the assessment of our varied apostolates (Dec. 4: 125), especially in the light of its promulgation of the contemporary mission: "Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice".

Phase three: Parish ministry encouraged

The above phase had, in a way, opened the doors for Jesuits to move into parish ministry. The number of parishes began to rapidly increase. This scenario was also engineered by the fact that some new countries that were getting freed around that time from colonization, were primarily permitting only parish ministry. In other words, parish ministry was the only possibility to begin our work and at the same time it was really a priority need.

Hence, in 1978, six different assistancies, through eight postulates presented to the Congregation of Procurators, asked for some pastoral guidelines. Accordingly, Fr. Arrupe - 08th- December of 1979 - came out with a splendid communication addressed to all major superiors (AR-1979,

pp.889 - 895) entitled, "Some Guidelines for the Parish Apostolate". The very sub-titles of its three sections, as given below, had conveyed the significance that the parish ministry had begun acquiring in the Jesuit world:

1. When and under what conditions should parishes be accepted
(Nos : 01-08)
2. How can we improve the quality of our work in the parishes
(Nos : 09-17)
3. Jesuits in parishes which are not entrusted to the society
(Nos : 18-21)

Arrupe 's guidelines indeed had a personal and experiential touch , since when he reached the shores of Japan way back in 1938, his first assignment was as a parish priest in Yamaguchi. The highlights of his guidelines could be enlisted as follows, given they contain lots of pastoral sparks:

a. If the parish is to realize its potential, it should not merely be a place where Sacraments are administered to a small number of practicing Christians. Rather, it should be a center where the Word of God is preached inspiring a deep probing; and, where there is a sense of openness to local social, economic, political and cultural problems.

b. The special concerns of the parish should be the poorest, the working people, the marginalized, the non-believers and all who are at a distance from the Church. As such, the parish is one of the best ministries for "faith that does justice" (GC 32 : Dec. 4).

c. We should also bring a missionary dimension to the parish, by being alert to foster a sense of universality and by being open to the basic needs of all human beings beyond our parish boundaries.

d. We must make use of all possible means of developing the lay ministry.

e. Jesuits assigned to parishes will exercise their ministries according to our " Ignatian way of proceeding", while following the pastoral directives of the local Church.

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f. Jesuits engaged in parish ministry should try all their best to be creative. And the parishes entrusted to the Society should become model parishes, energized by the “Spiritual Exercises”.

g. Jesuits who work in parishes should be gifted in many ways, such as having, ardent apostolic zeal, true creativity, cordial human relationships and a knack for organization. All this calls for proper socio-pastoral trainings and some practical experiments in parish ministry all through the years of our Jesuit formation and an ongoing formation.

During GC 33 (1983), an attempt was made to adopt a positive attitude with regard to parish work. The proposal was turned down by the delegates. However, later in 1990, the Congregation of Provincials had to take into account the existence of more than 3200 Jesuits working full time in more than 1900 parishes. Accordingly, Fr. Kolvenbach in his document of the 20th Sept.1990 gives a possible description of a Jesuit parish: one that exercises fully the Jesuit apostolic priorities in the areas of spiritual needs, of the social apostolate and of a missionary outlook.

In continuation of the above context, GC 34 followed by a landmark Decree No 19 on Parish Ministry in March 1995. It is a short but clearly written decree, where the following salient features of Jesuit parish ministry were enumerated:

- 1 Participation in the Jesuit apostolic priorities
- 2 Part of the mission - plan of the province
- 3 Discernment and our way of proceeding
- 4 Creativity and inculturation
- 5 Inter- religious dialogue and ecumenism
- 6 A participatory Church through basic communities
- 7 Lay partnership and leadership
- 8 Local and global justice and structural change
- 9 Networking with other Jesuit ministries as well as with other Church and civil organisations.
- 10 Contribution to a genuine culture of solidarity that transcends parish boundaries

With the above characteristics, our parish apostolic works would be in line with the Ignatian vision, commented Fr. Kolvenbach, as long as

we go out into the streets to meet people and not just stay within the church compound waiting for them to come to us. Ignatius and the first companions liked to be with the people in the streets where daily life was lived by the marginalized majority.

By being present in the streets, continued Kolvenbach, we have much to share but also much to learn and to receive. Only there can our ministry of pastoral service with the other dimensions of our single mission of integral Evangelisation, namely struggle for justice, transformation of culture and inter-religious dialogue, become a reality. Inculturation, which is the encounter between a living people and the living Gospel, is indeed a concretisation of Ignatius' passion to help people to encounter "God in all things and all things in God".

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We could conclude this section with the reflections of Peter D. Byrne, (ORE) himself a Jesuit pastor in his article entitled, "Jesuit and Parish Ministry":

We could be "confident in the creativity, resourcefulness and imagination of Jesuit pastors to respond to the new challenges of GC 34 on parish ministry - the needs of God's people to experience a deepening of their faith and the cry of the poor for the justice of God" (Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, 29/3: May 1997).

JEPASA of South Asian Assistancy

"On behalf of the whole Society, I would like to place on record my appreciation and gratitude to the GC 34 - delegates from South Asia . If it were not for their dynamism and determination, the decree on Parish Ministry would not have seen the light of day", declared Fr. Kolvenbach (The 1997- Convention of JEPASA, India).

True...! At the same time, the solidarity and support of delegates from other Jesuit assistancies during GC 34 are also to be gratefully

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acknowledged. It was a history- making decree, initiated by JEPASA. It was a venture from below. The pastoral coordinators of 18 provinces and regions came together in September, 1989.

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At that time, the South Asian Assistancy was taking care of 280 parishes with the investment of 418 Jesuits. The three day - colloquium resulted, after a profound prayerful discernment, in formulating “the Goal of Jesuit Parish Ministry in South Asia” :

“To build up an integrated, inter-faith, fully alive human community in order to actualize the Reign of God. This service would, generally, start with the local Christian community and eventually, in and through that community, reach out to the larger community ”

GC 34 certainly offered a big momentum to movements like JEPASA. A special South Asian Pastoral Consultation in 1995 was organised by JEPASA to ponder over all the decrees, besides the one on Parish Ministry , and to present “ A Charter of Five Challenges “ :

- 1 To build basic human communities, open to other religions and cultures.
- 2 To develop creative paradigms of pastoral approaches with reference to inculturation, dialogue and liberation.
- 3 To respond to the aspirations of the youth of today and prepare them for their rightful role in the Church and society.
- 4 To live and contextualize faith that does justice in the parish-ministry .
- 5 To work actively towards the realization of a participatory Church offering full scope to lay men and women in all parish praxis.

These challenges have been progressively sharpened by the South Asia Convention of JEPASA held every four years. Each time, about 160 Jesuit pastors and Jesuit bishops come together for a collective review and

a further response - plan based on the dictates and directives of GCs, South Asian signs of the times and the Ignatian charism .

The greeting of GC35 – delegates to Jesuit Pastors

For the consideration of GC 35, on Parish Ministry nine postulates were received . Four of them came from three collective bodies of pastoral coordinators of the South Asian and the North and South American Assistancies. For the first time in Jesuit history, there were 50 delegates who had come to a congreation with experiences of Parish Ministry. Just compare it to 17 in GC 34.

The Jesuit Pastors at GC 35 had three informal but fraternal meetings outside business hours.

They had also organised a special Eucharist at the General Curia - Chapel to seek God's graces for all Jesuit Pastors and their pastoral communities across the world; almost all the members of GC 35 participated. Fr. Nicolás Adolfo, who formed part of a pastoral team in a slum parish in Tokyo from 2000-04 and now our General joined in the Eucharistic celebration and blessed the Jesuit Parish Ministry. The 10 concelebrants at the altar from the 10 Assistancies represented the total world of Jesuit Pastors.

During the Eucharist liturgy a "Greeting – statement" expressing encouragement, solidarity and support to all Jesuit Pastors was read. Later the document was formally signed and passed on to all the Major Superiors so that it could be transmitted to each and every Jesuit Pastor :

WE are, for the first time in our Jesuit history, blessed with the presence of 50 delegates who have come to a GC with rich experiences of parish ministry in the most varied contexts and cultures of the world.

WE are grateful to God for granting us a new vision and a new vigour to our parish ministry through Decree 19 of GC 34. While reaffirming its profound demands, we promise to translate them into progressive pastoral services.

WE are now graced with an increased number of over 3,000 Jesuits in parish ministry. This very grace beckons us to

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grow into a more collaborative Church where the lay women and men will have their rightful place, celebrated through the breaking of the Word and Bread, energized by Ignatian spirituality, “in well-planned, creative and inculturated ways” (GC 34.19).

- WE challenge ourselves to “not to reduce our parish to a well built compound waiting for people to come but to develop it more and more ministering to the marginalized sectors, the poor, the young and the workers” (Kolvenbach). This missionary spirit “becomes a deep divine revelation” (Benedict XVI).
- WE dedicate ourselves “to make our Jesuit parishes into model ones” (Arrupe) by serving faith that does justice and by engaging in dialogue with all other churches and religions, traditions and cultures.
- WE make our own the pastoral goals of the local Church, and we network with other Jesuit apostolic ministries as well as other ecclesial and civil movements for “a new earth and a new heaven” (Rev. 21.1)
- WE commit ourselves to all the new insights of GC 35, particularly to the crying concerns of ecology and to the inviting stewardship of God’s creation.
- WE are delighted to have as our new General, Fr. Nicolás Adolfo who did ministry for four years (2000-04) in a parish-context.
- We are assured of his total support for a greater animation, formation and coordination of Jesuit pastoral ministry, at the level of provinces and assistancies.
- WE continue to grow in Jesuit solidarity as “friends in the Lord”, supporting and encouraging one another to reach out for the Magis in our parish ministry. To accomplish all this, we fervently pray for and fraternally stand by one another.

A word of synthesis

We are living in a privileged moment of Jesuit history, and much more so with reference to parish ministry. That means we have to constantly try to discover, define and reach out for “the pastoral Magis”. As Fr. Arrupe put it in a similar context, “We should stop giving answers of yesterday’s to the problems of today’s.” Creativity is the need of the hour. Ours is a holy boldness, a certain apostolic aggressivity, typical of our way of proceeding....!

Parishes, moreover, offer a favourable context to live with the poor and to be in solidarity with them (GC 34:Dec.19:02). Parishes become a graced base for Jesuit presence from which we can also carry out other apostolates suited to our charism .(Letter of Fr. Kolvenbach on “ accepting and withdrawing from parishes”, 99/07, 06th may, 1997).

Jesuit parish ministry is called upon by the changing and challenging world of today, “to take the road less travelled by and thereby to make a difference “ in a wider ecclesial and pastoral arena . Thus, Jesuit parish ministry is also beckoned to present itself more and more proactive, productive and prophetic. In other words, “A new way of being church in the modern world”.