

# INTRODUCTION

## GC<sub>35</sub> GIFT AND MISSION

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The time before and after a General Congregation of the Society of Jesus is vital for all Jesuits. Indeed, much of the fruit of a GC depends on these two long periods of time. Each apostolic work, community and province prepares for the congregation in different ways: with love, sometimes with passion, ingenuity or even pessimistic realism, while striving to retain an air of discernment and hope. The analysis of our mission in new situations, and an ever new awareness of the signs of the times together with an effort to formulate them in intelligible, meaningful language, is part of the work done by all members of the Society, young and old, in formation, in diverse missions and work, in old age or in illness. Particular realities of members of this apostolic body, present and active in more than 120 countries in all continents, with considerable historical and cultural differences, create a large mosaic of interpretations and expectations. Great desires are enkindled and spiritual dispositions desired deep down in the heart of each Jesuit. Creative fidelity in obedience identifying with the mission of the Society is reenergized.

We are grateful to the hundreds of colleagues and Jesuits whose hidden work planning and organizing, facilitating with long- and short-term preparations, laid the foundation for the congregation itself: a two month gathering

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of 225 delegates praying, discerning, visioning, listening, deciding, thinking, writing, celebrating with the entire Society of Jesus in their minds and heart. The reduction of such an intense experience into a few pages is extremely difficult. This congregation in particular was characterized by three profound experiences especially difficult to formulate because of their force and profundity: the resignation of Fr. Kolvenbach and the Society's appreciation of his government; the consolation of the papal audience with Pope Benedict XVI's warm relations with the Society; and the unfolding experience of the Ignatian process of discernment that resulted in the election of Fr. Adolfo Nicolás. This collective spiritual consolation accompanied each delegate in some way or other throughout the deliberations.

The spirituality of the heart, so characteristic of Ignatian spirituality reached its apex in this congregation of wise men. All six decrees or documents produced by GC35 reflect this collective spiritual experience lived by men on mission. They require attentive reading and indeed through the prayer of repetition, we begin to appreciate and understand what lies behind it all. Without contemplative eyes and a perceptive heart, one is out of touch with the experience lived by the assembled Jesuits. And without this analogical lived reference the decrees lose much of their meaning and vision.

It takes time to savour the decrees within the context of different social and cultural realities, apostolic works, and daily religious life as Jesuits. The six decrees strive to read our mission in the world today and outline procedures to be followed in our discernments. At the same time they are a point of departure for further questions and answers, for more personal and common spiritual discernments, for new decisions and new projects. A GC is not a closed book. Bridging the past, assuming the present state of the Society and intuiting the future of our service to the church and to humanity, the congregation pushes us to more freedom of spirit to seek God's will at all costs so that the Spirit may lead us.

We are grateful to the authors of the following articles, each of which helps us understand, assimilate and discern better with the participants of GC35 our rooted identity, mission and apostolic religious way of life today.

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*“The Lord does not give us harvests, but rather small mustard seeds which must be received and cultivated”*

**Benjamin González Buelta, S.J.**

*“The twin factors of globalization and universality will require of us spiritual depth and intellectual vigour”*

**Paul L. Locatelli, S.J.**

*“Does the South Asian assistance remain a sort of dilemma for the rest of the Society after GC35?”*

**George Pattery, S.J.**

*“The awareness that it is the world – human society, the people, most especially the poor – that is the locus of life and action of the Society of Jesus”*

**Arturo Sosa, S.J.**

*“The new structures proposed must be seen in the light of our mission and our spirituality”*

**Alfred Darmanin, S.J.**

*“The clever person is not overcome by difficulties”*

**Isaac Kiyaka, S.J.**

*“What is first and last is the experience of Christ found because sought, looked upon because met, listened to because followed, served because loved ”*

**François-Xavier Dumortier, S.J.**