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Father General

Commemoration of the second centenary of the Restoration of the Society of Jesus

Dear brothers and friends in the Lord,

Almost two years ago, on 1 January 2012, I wrote to all Major Superiors, requesting them to begin preparing for the commemoration in 2014 of the second centenary of the Restoration of the Society of Jesus. With this letter, I wish to invite every Jesuit, all our collaborators, every community, apostolic work, Region and Province of the Society to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Restoration of the Society in 2014 with humble and sincere gratitude to the Lord, with a desire to learn from our history, and as an occasion for spiritual and apostolic renewal.

2014 will be an important year for studying our history as a Society. In many parts of the world, scholarly studies, publications, meetings, and academic conferences have been planned in order to promote a deeper knowledge and understanding of the complex realities of the Suppression and the Restoration of the Society: the events, the causes, the important protagonists, and the consequences. I am grateful for all the work that has been done, and I hope that this important work of historical research and study will continue even after 2014. As we all know, memory and identity are profoundly linked: one who forgets his past does not know who he is. The better we remember our history and the more deeply we understand it, the better we will understand ourselves and our identity as an apostolic body in the Church.

At the same time, I ask that during 2014 historical study be deepened by personal and communal prayer, reflection, and discernment. I believe the best mode of entering spiritually into this special year -the 200th anniversary of the Papal Bull *Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum*, issued by Pope Pius VII on 7 August 1814- is to seek the grace proposed by St. Ignatius in the *contemplatio ad amorem*: to ask the Lord for "an interior knowledge of all the good I have received, so that acknowledging this with gratitude, I may love and serve His Divine Majesty in everything." (SpEx 23) In other words, we do not wish our attention to be focused solely on the past. We wish to understand and appreciate our past better so that we may go forward into the future with "renewed fervor and zeal" (GC 35, Decree 1) for our life and mission today.

Let me propose some possible themes for your prayer, reflection, and discernment for the coming year.

1. **Creative fidelity:** What does it mean for us today that the Society, which outside the Russian empire lost everything during the Suppression, was able to begin again without any resources? In addition, what might we learn from the attempts of the restored Society to be faithful to the Ignatian heritage in vastly changed circumstances?

2. **Love for our Institute:** According to an important letter entitled *On the Love of our Society and our Institute* (1830), written by one of the most significant figures of the restored Society, Fr. General Jan Roothaan, a temptation of some members of the newly reestablished Society was to love her, we might say, in an external or superficial way: to value the riches of having many institutions; the honor of being esteemed by others; the pride of being powerful and influential again. Instead, Fr. Roothaan sought to promote a love for the inner reality of the Society: her Institute, her spirit and values, her way of proceeding rooted in the Spiritual Exercises. What is the

significance for us today of this call to focus above all on a knowledge and love of our Institute?

3. **Fraternal companionship:** Another important figure for this period was St. Joseph Pignatelli, who, during the difficult times of expulsion and homelessness, united, strengthened and encouraged his brothers. Even during the Suppression, he maintained communication, friendship, and hope among former companions. What does the witness of those who cared for their brothers during a time of crisis say to us today, who are called by GC 35 to live "community as mission"?

4. **Universal Mission:** One of the marks of the restored Society was a remarkable missionary spirit and activity. By the generalate of Fr. Roothaan, of the 5,209 members of the Society, 19% worked outside the Provinces they entered. Many Provinces in Asia, Africa, America and Australia trace their origins to this time of the restored Society. What might be the significance of this strong sense of universal mission in the newly reestablished Society for us today?

5. **Faith in Providence:** Our forefathers in the Society lived through challenging times: the Suppression; the precarious existence of the Society in the Russian empire; localized recognition of the Society until its universal Restoration in 1814; the fragile and difficult beginnings of the restored Society. What can we learn from the patient endurance, the fortitude, the faith and trust in God's providence and the Spirit's presence in the Church of our brothers during this tumultuous period?

I wish to confirm what I asked for in my previous letter on the year 2014: that our commemoration of the Restoration -which officially begins on January 3, the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and ends on September 27, the anniversary of the confirmation of the Society in 1540- avoid any suggestion of triumphalism or pride. Nevertheless, even in simple, modest ways, I hope that all communities, Regions and Provinces of the Society make efforts to commemorate this anniversary in a manner that is memorable as well as personally and communally significant.

As we look to this milestone in our history as a Society, let us humbly thank God that our least Society continues to exist today: that in the Society, we continue to find a path to God in the *spirituality* of St. Ignatius; that we continue to grow from the support and challenge of our brothers in *community*; that we still experience the privilege and joy of serving the Church and the world, especially those most in need, through our *ministries*. I pray that our grateful commemoration of this 200th anniversary of the Society's reestablishment might be blessed with a deeper appropriation of our way of life and a more creative, generous and joyful commitment to give our lives in service for the greater glory of God.

Sincerely in our Lord

Adolfo Nicolás S.J.
Superior General

Rome, 14 Novembre 2013

Feats of Saint Joseph Pignatelli

(Original: English)

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