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Conversations with Father General

The Jesuits

We are the Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers founded half a millennium ago by the soldier-turned-mystic Ignatius Loyola. But most people call us "the Jesuits." In the vision of our founder, we seek to "find God in all things." We dedicate ourselves to the "greater glory of God" and the good of all humanity. And we do so gratefully in collaboration with others who share our values, including laypersons. They have become part of the "we," the extended Jesuit family. Our collaboration with the laity flows from our personal relationships with Christ. We see ourselves as companions of Jesus, and we invite others to join with us, as friends in the Lord. Together we build up the body of Christ. With our friends and partners, we also reach out to a broadly diverse world because that's where God is. From experience and reflection, we know that meaning, value, and divine purpose can be discovered "in all things."

Beginning this month, the *Jesuits Around the World Bulletin* will publish a special edition titled "Conversations with Father General Adolfo Nicolás" on various aspects of Jesuit life. In the first of the series, Father General discusses Jesuit community life with Father Patrick Mulemi, Director of Communications and Public Relations at the General Curia in Rome.

On Community

GC35 spoke about Community as Mission (D.3, No.41). In one of your letters, you suggested that Jesuits think of community as a kind of "ministry." What did you mean by that?

R. Our ministry to the laity and the visibility that we have as a community have radically changed. We do not have any more "Cloister" and all our communities have improved - which is a very good thing - in hospitality. Even our tables are more open than before to people, the very people that before we considered "outsiders". That means, among other things, that the quality of our community life, the depth and joy of our conversations and exchange, are now transparent and, as such, a service or a scandal to the laity. Consequently, to build community and to care for the members of the community can be a service of much worth in our apostolic life.

It seems that community life is typically a concern among Jesuits. Why do you think we struggle with community life in the Society? What are the main ailments facing community life in the Society today?

R. I cannot give you an overall explanation of the reasons. I can speak about my own experience, which was part of that of many others in the past. We were initiated to Community life with writings of Sainly monks and other "monastics" of the past. I never heard in my early years as a Jesuit what I could read later. That is, that "Community in general" is not a theme in the New Testament. That in the New Testament we do not find definitions of what a Community is or is not; instead, we find many indications of Christian attitudes that build community, and injunctions to do what is good for the other. In the letters of Saint Paul, we find more than 80 such phrases, like "forgive each other," support, help, be patient with, carry the burdens, encourage, and so on. I can understand the omission of what was yet to be researched. I simply try to explain why this is an issue with Jesuits.

How do you think "workaholism" contributes to difficulties in community life? Do you have any practical suggestions to alleviate these problems?

R. I think that there is a tendency among men to identify with what we do, with our responsibilities... and, when the time comes, with our social position, which we want to perform well. The problem is compounded by the fact that, if you are talented, requests will rain on you. The more possibilities to serve you have, the greater the need will be to discern well the distribution of your time. We cannot do everything. For a good ministry we need concentration, study, reflection and time. Dispersion of attention and energies does not help in the least to reach the evangelical depth and creativity that we want for our ministry.

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