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Father General

Annual Letters. In a letter of September 7 to the whole Society Father General offers a synthesis of "ex-officio" letters, the annual letters sent from every Province on matters he himself indicates year by year. Last year he asked for information on two matters: *vocation promotion and collaboration with others*.

On the first matter Father General writes: "The letters I received indicate that there have been positive developments in the Society in the area of vocation promotion. Perhaps most important of all is the fact that, in many provinces and regions, there is a Jesuit assigned full-time as vocation promoter, and that there are teams, often composed of young Jesuits, lay persons, and other religious, who work together to encounter and accompany young people in their search for God's will for them. More candidacy houses and programs have been established. New materials have been produced, and there has been much creative use of the resources of the internet. In many places, vocation promotion involves a deeper insertion in the life of a local Church and more collaboration with others in the Church, for example, with other religious and lay people. There is also more prayer for vocations in our communities." Underlying that all these initiatives seem to be fruitful he continues: "As we face the growth or the diminishment of our numbers, I believe that we are called to keep together two attitudes. First, we should remain trusting and peaceful, knowing that it is the Lord of the harvest who calls workers in the way he wishes and who holds the future of the Society in his hands. Second, and at the same time, we should commit ourselves more completely to this important ministry, which allows us to be instruments of the Eternal King, so that "to all and to each one in particular, his call" might "go out," be heard and accepted with joy and generosity (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, No. 95)." Then Fr. Nicolás indicates "some challenges and invitations to action that might help us do better in vocation promotion."

On the second matter, *the collaboration with others*, Father General writes: "There are many encouraging developments in the area of collaboration with others, according to letters received this year. Many provinces and regions report improved relationships with our collaborators and a widespread and peaceful acceptance that such collaboration is an important value for us and for the renewal of the Church in response to Vatican II, not a measure to deal with diminishing manpower (...) I think it is essential that every Jesuit understand and accept that collaboration is not a temporary or even a recent development. A realistic look at our history clearly indicates that collaboration is not a new phenomenon. From the time of our father Ignatius, *everything* that Jesuits have been able to accomplish has been due to the generous and selfless dedication and help of many other people." And referring to this second matter Father Nicolás indicates some particular points and reflections which could be useful.

At the end of the letter Father General announces that the next Congregation of Procurators, whose convocation will be called soon, will be held in Africa in July 2012. This is the first time that such a Congregation will be held outside Europe.

Year for Priests. On September 9 Father General wrote a letter to the whole Society on the conclusion of the Year for Priests, officially closed by Benedict XVI on June 18. After mentioning his previous invitation to all Jesuits "to take time for prayer, reflection and conversation" regarding priesthood in the Society of Jesus (...) to promote a deeper understanding and appreciation among Jesuits of an essential aspect of our charism as a sacerdotal religious community," Fr. Nicolás mentions the many initiatives of the Provinces and Regions took on this occasion, thanks Jesuits and communities and then he continues: "It is clear from the responses sent to me that one cannot reduce the lived experience of priesthood in the Society of Jesus to a single theological formulation. This comes as no surprise for we exercise our priestly ministry in such varying cultures and situations, which naturally influence our perspectives and thinking. But this is always the way it has been in the Society. Because the Church has sent us and continues to send us *to the frontiers*, priesthood in the Society has always been exercised in various ways, in response to the rich range of missions that the Church has entrusted to the Society." And he adds: "While there is no single way of living the priesthood in the Society, there are common elements uniting us Jesuits that might be considered as a *distinctive style* of living the priesthood." Referring to this matter he mentions St. Ignatius and his

first companions. The letter focuses then on how we live our priesthood today and also on the sins of priests which the Pope pointed out in his homily at the close of the Year for Priests, recalling the need for purification also inside the Society and "to promote healing and reconciliation in situations where we are involved." The letter ends with another reference to Saint Ignatius and the first companions who "intensely desired to be consecrated to God: to put themselves completely into God's hands so that they could be transformed into God's instruments. They were keenly aware of their weaknesses; yet they experienced even more powerfully that they were called by the Eternal Lord of all things to be his companions in mission."

From the Curia

Meeting of Ecumenical and Interreligious Consultants. From September 6 to 8 Fr. General met for three days with his newly appointed consultants on ecumenical and interreligious relationships. They discussed current developments in the Catholic Church's relationship with other Christian communities, and with Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and indigenous religions. A principal focus was on how the Society should contribute to or participate in these encounters. The group, together with Fr. General, also had fruitful meetings separately with the two Vatican Councils for ecumenical and interreligious relationships. The consultants will continue working in their current individual missions in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, keeping informed about the developments in their respective fields. They will meet together with Fr. General once each year, and between meetings will keep the General informed of important issues in the Society's relationships with their particular religious groups.

New in SJWEB

A *podcast* (in French) with Fr. Mpay Kemboly, a Jesuit from the Central African Province. He teaches African Thinking and Ancient Philosophy at our Institute in Kimwenza (Congo) and has been invited by Fr. General to participate at the first meeting of the Counselors for interreligious dialogue and ecumenism as counselor for the traditional African religions. Click on "Jesuit Voices".

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P. Patrick Mulemi SJ

Borgo S. Spirito 4 | 00193 Roma Italia

Tel: +39-06-6986-8289 | infosj-dir@sjcuria.org



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Jesuit Press and Information Office
Borgo S. Spirito 4 | 00193 Roma Italy
Tel: +39-06-6986-8289 | infosj-dir@sjcuria.org

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