

STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

THE MOMENT OF GC 36 FOR
ITS MEMBERS

MEMBERS OF GENERAL CONGREGATION 36

49/3 AUTUMN 2017

THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS is a publication of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

The subjects treated in STUDIES may be of interest also to Jesuits of other regions and to other religious, clergy, and laity. All who find this journal helpful are welcome to access previous issues at: ejournals@bc.edu/jesuits.

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MEMBERS OF GENERAL CONGREGATION 36

EDITED BY HUNG T. PHAM, SJ

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first, a word from the issue editor. . . .

Rowing is neither loud nor flashy. The sport is marked by quiet gracefulness and concerted teamwork. Individuals who commit to rowing share an intense determination to overcome distractions and their own personal predilections, as they work together to row the boat forward. Rowers can testify to the demanding regimen of waking up at terribly early hours of the morning, of their punishing work on the “erg” (rowing machine), of the endless rivulets of sweat, of muscles aching and twitching. But in addition to the discipline and dedication of each individual member, their strokes must be coordinated until they become a single crew. Unless all rowers pull in time with each other, fluidly and without hesitation, the boat will stall. In this sense, rowing represents a commitment that is both individual and communal.

One year ago, on October 2, 2016, two hundred and fifteen Jesuits from all provinces and regions of the Society of Jesus gathered in prayer as members of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, joined in spirit by innumerable Jesuits, friends, collaborators, and partners around the world, at the opening Mass in the Church of the Gesù in Rome. Inspired by Pope Francis’s exhortation to the Society on the 200th anniversary of its restoration, the congregation’s logo reminds all members of the Society of the task entrusted to them: to be “brave and expert rowers. . . . Row, be strong, even against a headwind! We row in the service of the Church. We row together!”¹

For me, the six-week experience of working in the aula as one of the delegates from the Conference of the United States and Canada was a similar kind of exercise regimen. Achieving a union of heart and mind among all the delegates in the aula was strenuous, both physically and spiritually. We spent long hours sitting and walking, listening and exchanging ideas, debating and voting. There were days when coordina-

¹ “Homily of Pope Francis Celebrating 200 Years Since the Re-Establishment of the Society of Jesus,” *America*, October 1, 2014, accessed September 4, 2017, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/homily-pope-francis-celebrating-200-years-re-establishment-society-jesus>.

tion among ourselves seemed elusive: as a group we were often confused, apprehensive, or stymied by conflicting ideologies and agendas. Yet there were other days when we were all deeply immersed in prayer, and profoundly moved by love for the Society. I think, for example, of the election of our superior general, and of the affection we felt for our Jesuit companions living and laboring on the frontiers, often in contexts of wars and violence. Through it all, the congregation as one body remained rooted in the Society's charism, and dedicated itself to an ongoing discernment for divine light and direction.

In the present issue of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, ten participants at General Congregation 36, all from Canada and the United States, offer their own perspectives on the experience of "Rowing into the Deep." I invited each to reflect on how his experience of rowing in the aula continues to impact his life and mission. May these essays inspire Jesuits to aspire to row together, in the service of the church and world, for the greater glory of God.

Hung T. Pham, SJ
Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

... and a word from the general editor

The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality thanks Fr. Pham for suggesting this issue of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, and for laboring to put it together.

The Seminar welcomes two new members, both of whom hail from the English Canada Province. Fr. Gilles Mongeau is Professor of Systematic Theology at Regis College in Toronto, superior of the Cardoner House of formation, and coordinator of the first studies program. Fr. Joseph Gavin is superior of the Oglivie Residence in Ottawa. A retired historian, he currently edits three volumes on the history of the English Canada Province. On behalf of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, our thanks to both men for their generosity.

Barton T. Geger, SJ
Editor

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The Moment of GC 36 for Its Members

One year after the conclusion of General Congregation 36, Fr. Hung Pham, SJ (ucs), of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality, invited members of the congregation from Canada and the United States to describe the impact of that event on their own spirituality and apostolic work.

1. Eyes Wide Open

Guy J. Consolmagno (MAR)

“**A** General Congregation is like a six-week faculty meeting mashed up with a six-week retreat.” I forget from whom I first heard this, but the description was certainly apt. It is true that we experienced at times—though, to be honest, fewer times than I feared—the horrors of a faculty meeting: the tedious rehashing of arguments long gone stale, and the tendency of those who have the least to say demanding the most time to say it. That is only to be expected when you bring together some two-hundred-plus Jesuits who are all used to being in leadership positions. But the surprise to me was the other experience, the sense of being on retreat. The general congregation was a remarkably spiritual experience.

Every day started with twenty minutes of prayer and song—and I did not begrudge a moment of that time. Every day ended with a Mass; indeed, several masses were offered, in several languages. While I had the feeling that all the “cool kids” went to the Italian Mass, I chose to stay with English, if only to see the remarkable variety of ways in which Asians, South Asians, Africans, British, Irish, Americans, Canadians, and all the others who did not have liturgies available in their native tongues, celebrate the Eucharist. This was a time to be united once again

with fellow Jesuits from around the world, in the presence of the One who had called us to be his companions.

Because I am a Jesuit brother, a central part of my daily life is focused on finding a Mass to attend. This in turn makes me a connoisseur of liturgies, and it makes me especially sensitive to how others celebrate Mass. Whether at a parish church or with a large group of Jesuits, as at the general congregation, my practice has been to concentrate, eyes closed, on the events of the Mass—on how the priest says the words and how the other ministers present the readings and music. I confess, this eyes-closed approach is also often a restful way to recover from the stresses of the day, given that our community has Mass in the late afternoon. And it fits my personality: like many a Jesuit, I identify as an introvert. Dealing with people, as I do in my daily work, can be very enervating.

But a funny thing happened as the days went by at the congregation. The first inkling that this was more than just a giant faculty meeting was, from the very start, an unmistakable presence of the Lord in our midst. This was not an experience I would typically associate with faculty meetings! For instance, the Mass that opened our congregation at the Gesù and the rainy Friday morning when we dashed to Saint Peter to celebrate Mass together at the main altar were special moments when I felt a Presence—very much like sensing a stranger in a dark room. The moments when Father Nicolás spoke to us as he withdrew from his role as superior general, and the moment when Pope Francis entered the aula to speak to us, were both graced events.

We knew early on that the morning prayers were being streamed over the internet. We heard reports from all over the world of friends and strangers who were praying with us. The weight of that knowledge began to affect how I behaved. That much, I suppose, was natural; my assigned seat was by the central aisle, and so I wound up in the background of many camera views. Beyond knowing that we were all on camera praying together, though, I was also very conscious of being part of a larger community—a community that extended far beyond the aula where we met.

But a key moment for me was praying before the exposed Blessed Sacrament the night before we elected the superior general. As a cradle Catholic, active in parish life as an altar boy from before Vatican II, I must have attended a thousand such expositions. This time, though, I had to confront face to face the awesome meaning of the Presence before me. This is real. More, this is Real.

Was it all in my head? Of course. But why on earth should that mean that it is not real?

One of the more mundane surprises of the congregation was learning I was in the older half—indeed, the oldest quarter—of the attendees. As a pleasant result, I was assigned a room at the meeting site itself, tucked away in an obscure corner of the infirmary floor. Every day, I found myself walking among those for whom prayer has become their apostolate. That was incredibly moving—and, occasionally, amusing.

For instance, we were given several hours in the middle of the day for *pranzo*, the traditional main meal of the Italian day. And since I was living on site, unlike those who needed to walk half an hour or more back to their residences for the meal, I had plenty of time afterward to rest my eyes in my room. While I was napping in my darkened room, two retired Italian Jesuits from the infirmary would meet up to say the rosary together outside my window every afternoon. Lest you think this was just a bit too pious, let me report that nearly every day the two of them would fall into vigorous arguments about which mysteries were to be noted that day, or how many decades they had completed already!

What could be more natural than two Jesuits arguing about their apostolate? It was a reminder that more Jesuits today are engaged in praying for the Society than in any other work. It reminded me, too, that this apostolate is what all the rest of us are preparing ourselves for, eventually. And this prayer, too, is real; and Real.

Three weeks into the congregation, I fell victim to the influenza that virtually everyone managed to catch. Thanks to living just upstairs from the meeting rooms, I was able to drag myself to the congregation every day, in spite of my low-grade fever and diminished strength. I confess that, for some of the longer sessions, I may have drifted off into a

state where I was less than half aware; however, was that really any different from ordinary faculty meetings, which at times are best endured with eyes closed?

Even when I was at my weakest, though, I did attend to the business at hand. There were a few times when I added my voice to the long

"We heard reports from all over the world of friends and strangers who were praying with us. The weight of that knowledge began to affect how I behaved." —Consolmagno

rota of those who would speak to the congregation. (I, too, am a Jesuit used to having my say.) But here as well, the atmosphere of where we were would sometimes slip from faculty meeting to retreat mode—such as when I heard myself expressing ideas

the origin of which I could not discern, saying things that surprised even me, and even more surprising when I heard the rest of the congregation listening to those words. Once—maybe twice—something I said made a difference. This, too, was Real.

Like a retreat, often the most important moments were small and hidden: the one-on-one conversations before we voted for the superior general, when I became aware of Jesuits and works and situations to which I before had closed my eyes; the small-group meetings where we heard each other speak aloud the dreams that we had previously kept to ourselves; the raw moments when tensions and fears in others and in ourselves were exposed for all to see.

In mid-November, the congregation drew to a close with a day of prayer, reflection, and Mass together at Saint Ignatius Church. Somewhere during that day, the insights I have tried to express here finally became visible to me. I am not sure I have expressed them clearly enough here for anyone else to see what I am talking about. Perhaps it is enough to simply state the following: since the end of the congregation, my work is different. For one thing, now I open our daily staff meetings at the Vatican Observatory with a prayer. Since returning from the congregation, I pray differently, mixing formal words and informal meditation. As often as not, I now meditate with my eyes open, taking in the world and the people around me. Even more challenging, though, is this: since the congregation, I have resolved that when I attend daily

Mass, a brother in the pews, I no longer close my eyes and enter a private reverie. I no longer use being “an introvert” as an excuse to separate myself from my fellow companions.

Since the congregation, I keep my eyes open.

2. Inspiration, Encouragement, and Direction

Joseph S. Costantino (UNE)

In his final speech before the Constitutional Convention, at eighty-one years young, Benjamin Franklin remarked: “when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men, all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests, and their selfish views.”¹ When I consider my experience of the 36th General Congregation, Franklin was spot-on. For who among the two hundred and twelve Jesuit members did not arrive with his own personal baggage? I know I did.

Similarly, before the election of Father General, Jesuit Father Lisbert D’Souza, in his exhortation to the members, underscored Franklin’s remark, but went a considerable bit further: “we are a very heterogeneous group, culturally and in other ways. Each has his own background, past experiences, personal preferences and so on. However, we are engaging in an exercise of communal discernment, and for that we must bring to the fore not our differences but what we have in common—our core values.” D’Souza, too, was spot-on. For who among the members did not desire to be engaged in what was best for the entire Society of Jesus? I know I did. In fact, that was something I palpably experienced from each of the members.

¹ In Richard R. Beeman, “Perspectives on the Constitution: A Republic, If You Can Keep It,” National Constitution Center, accessed September 2, 2017, <https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it>.

Therefore, besides my literal and figurative baggage, I brought to Rome our core Jesuit values and my deepest desires to always do what is in the best interests of the overall Society. And all of that also came along with me on June 1, 2016, when I arrived at Boston College to become the new pastor for the Parish of Saint Ignatius Loyola on Chestnut Hill. Even before my arrival, I knew that I would have to leave in just four short months to attend the congregation. Luckily, I already had seven years of experience as pastor of Saint Francis Xavier Church in New York City.

However, as any pastor will tell you, no two parishes are the same, even in the same diocese—just look how hard it is to merge adjacent parishes. In my case, I decided early on to prepare the parish for my absence. In bulletin letters, at different meetings, and in homilies, I explained the significance of these Jesuit general congregations. I pointed out how they differ from the much more frequent and briefer chapters of other religious orders. In this way, I hoped to justify my extended, indefinite absence. It was a source of great consolation to find my new parish community wonderfully supportive and truly excited about my participation in the congregation.

The GC 36 website, with its logo and tagline, “Rowing into the Deep,” was also widely shared with the parish. In fact, the pastoral council, in its enthusiasm for the upcoming congregation, worked with me to develop a new parish logo designed to suggest our solidarity with this theme. Consequently, among the pieces of baggage I brought to the congregation was to include the conviction that if we participants were to write any decrees—and I was not convinced that we should—then they must include that tagline. And so, you can only imagine my disappointment as I saw this phrase disappear from the draft decrees in which it had appeared earlier. I tried repeatedly to get it back in. If nothing else, I wanted to return to my new parish able to highlight that phrase. After all, they felt as if they too were “rowing into the deep,” getting me as their first new pastor in twenty-seven years. Yet, the inclusion of that phrase was not to be.

What happily did survive from earlier drafts was the clarion call for communal apostolic discernment, or CAD for short. It is one thing, however, to call for CAD and another to do it. Even when our decrees

were directly referencing its need, the congregation sometimes backed away, engaging instead, as Jesuits are wont to do, in debate instead of discernment. With debate, the baggage about which Franklin speaks and D'Souza cautions comes front and center. Yet whenever the members engaged in small group discussions and spiritual conversations, really listening and trying to appreciate one another's perspective, the possibility of genuine discernment began to emerge.

Now, if CAD posed a challenge for the members, all of whom had the advantage of having made the full Spiritual Exercises at least twice, this challenge also holds true, *a fortiori*, for a parish. Still, we have to begin somewhere. That somewhere, I think, is with the guiding principle of another theme of the congregation: collaboration. For many of our apostolic works, especially in the Conference of the United States and Canada, there might be a temptation to dismiss all too quickly the need for further collaboration. Do we not already have in our apostolates many lay collaborators in leadership and in various other roles?

"In grace and faith, we know that GC 36 is today what had its genesis in the first general congregation." —Geisinger

Collaboration in a parish context, however, should not simply allow lay people to engage in various ministries, often with various lay staff members as their leaders or coordinators. Rather, such collaboration should encourage genuine lay parishioner leadership. For example, most parishes have pastoral councils. Yet the pastoral council may in fact function more like a council of ministries, which often consists of representatives or chairs from the various ministries and committees of the parish. Its members are often the real doers in the parish. However, their leadership, if any, comes in the form of advising the pastor, who remains the sole decision maker.

Such councils, of course, can prove highly beneficial to the life blood of the parish but are very different from full-fledged, collaborative pastoral councils. For that, a parish needs a different type of council—one that might really share in pastoral leadership with him. A council that, for instance, would set goals by developing and overseeing the implementation of a parish strategic plan. It would also see that each

ministry of the parish embodies the parish's overall mission. The hallmark of such a leadership council is spiritual conversation and the use of CAD for all its decision making. The pastor—and herein lies the true challenge with this type of pastoral council—is simply one of the voices among the members, since it is the Spirit that is in charge.

Adopting this way of proceeding comes with the hope that every parish group and ministry, individually and collectively, will then follow the pastoral council's lead. So, instead of debate, each ministry would function in a spirit of discernment, always considering what is best for the overall good of the parish. Outside of the mundane management decisions, which still fall to the pastor, this type of collaboration provides tangible collaborative leadership that in turn can facilitate a parish's fuller engagement in the other major theme of the congregation: networking.

As the decree on Renewed Governance for a Renewed Mission reminds us, broad-based collaboration is essential for networking. For Saint Ignatius Parish—a diocesan church that is located, for all practical purposes, on Boston College's campus—we know that there are untapped resources and opportunities for further collaboration with BC and, with BC's help, for broader and more effective networking. And along with these challenges to discern, collaborate, and network, GC 36 helped foster, at least for our parish, the development of a social justice committee. While the parish has a robust and flourishing outreach mission dedicated to various works of mercy, it also has had this lacuna. Yet having and working with such a committee is surely one of the ways for Jesuits in parish ministry to incarnate what GC 36 calls Jesuits to be in the title of its first decree: companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice.

I pointed out to our fledgling group that, if some members of our parish community would come together to learn about issues of social injustice and discern which to address, then they could begin to educate the parish about those issues and in so doing provide ways for the parish to engage in various forms of advocacy. To learn, discern, educate, and advocate is the simple four-fold process I proposed. At our first gathering, one of our members asked us to consider, in line with GC 36, whether *reconciliation* should be added to our name and whether we

should have as our mission to give prophetic witness to reconciliation, justice, and peace. We have already moved in that direction, and the congregation clearly helped set the stage.

Returning to our nation's founding father, let me close by quoting Richard R. Beeman, who points out that Franklin, at the close of the Constitutional Convention, "thought it impossible to expect a 'perfect production' from such a gathering, but he believed that the Constitution they had just drafted, 'with all its faults,' was better than any alternative that was likely to emerge."² Once again, spot on. The two major decrees from GC 36 are far from perfect. We all know that. Yet when we read them along with all the decrees from the past five congregations, we might do well to remind ourselves that they were not written with one apostolate in mind or expressly for the apostolic works in our Conference. Still, they can offer inspiration, encouragement, and direction. This they do for our parish here in Chestnut Hill, and I hope that they do so for yours.

3. Motion

Robert J. Geisinger (UMI app DIR)

Motion. If one word captures for me the experience of GC 36, from a spiritual, personal, institutional, and religious perspective, it would be *motion*: common life in motion, patrimony and charisma in motion, a body in motion, the *Jesuit Constitutions* in motion, and above all, grace in motion.

Three memories come to mind.

First, for me, GC 36 was of a piece with GC 35. The consolations of GC 36 proceeded in part from the complexity of GC 35. From my personal vantage point, they are one story. The story opened in desolation, and concluded in consolation.

² Ibid.

Second, as someone involved in molding the new or revised GC 36 *formulae*—that is, rules and meeting method at the province and general congregation levels—living into the new approach was challenging, both practically and spiritually.

Third, in my current ministry as promoter of justice at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I took deeply to heart—even as I tried to remain neutral—the considerations of GC 36 regarding the protection of minors and of those who, because of particular vulnerability, are considered their equivalent.

Now, I offer an observation on each of these three.

The procurator general of the Society, along with the secretary of the Society and the treasurer general, attended GC 35 in 2008 by reason of office, only for the business portion (*ad negotia*) following the election of Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach's successor. The same was true for several brothers invited by the outgoing superior general—they were present in the aula only after the election of Father Adolfo Nicolás. I look at my fifteen years in the office of the procurator general as a remarkable gift that I will hold dear in this life and the next. As part of the package, I was able to attend GC 35 *ex officio*, which was a grace of its own. In the *ad negotia* portion of that general congregation, I was grateful for how I was fed, and grateful too for whatever I could offer my companions in light of my training and experience as a canon lawyer of the Society and beyond.

However, it is probably a sign of what I had *not* absorbed from the Spiritual Exercises that I found my exclusion from the first part—that is, in the *ad electionem* portion of GC 35—to be a spiritual desolation. It chewed me up—or rather, I let it chew me up. There is something direction-setting for the GC body in that period, including the resignation and election of superior general, and so coming into GC 35 in mid-stream was unsettling. Of course, this is whining—made worse by the fact that I am doing it publicly and in writing—but it is also a moment of honesty to say that, for me, the motion toward GC 36 in my general curia ministry until late 2014 was marked positively by the richness of GC 35 *ad negotia* as well as negatively by that lingering unpleasantness I associated with not being part of GC 35 *ad electionem*.

As GC 35 pulled further away in memory during the Nicolás years, it never occurred to me that I would participate in another GC, except by helping toward the comprehensive revision of the *formulae*, which brings me to the second of three facets of GC 36 that remain especially with me.

Decree 5 (numbers 2 through 6) of General Congregation 35 mandated a comprehensive revision of our *formulae*, especially of the general congregation *formula*, with specific and some obligatory indications. GC 35 allowed the superior general to make changes—meaty ones—with the deliberative vote of the general council, after consultation with our major superiors. In the autumn of 2010, a committee of five began mapping what would later become the revised *formulae*. I was happy to have chaired those early meetings, which gave way over the years to a fascinating, engaging, and provocative consultation process. By its conclusion, this process involved well over a hundred of Ours around the world. And in spite of the predictable frustrations of deadlines and the occasional bureaucratic hiccup, the overall project consoled me. When elected by my province brethren as a delegate to GC 36, I had something of a holy fear to see what the GC *formula* would feel like as we lived into it—a fear not alleviated when I was asked to serve as a member of the juridic commission of GC 36.

Never in my life had I prayed an institutional set of procedures—like one prays Scripture or homily prep—as to how to prepare for and hold big meetings, but my role in this revision process gave rise to just that. Helping to envision and implement what might further the body of the Society in its forward motion via province and general congregations, well, that was an extraordinary place to be in religious life, and a warm or at least true place to pray. The revision process and its products had flaws, but I found that I could only admire and love our governance more, having lived through such a digestion-and-nutrition process. This overall experience, especially that of the plenary session of GC 36 in Rome, marvelously capped for me my enlivening, unforgettable, and rewarding years in central governance as procurator general, where I often dealt with the shadows of our lives—which made the revision process a welcome complement. What a fantastic, consoling, arduous experience of the Second Week. And the Second Week is nothing if not motion.

For me, the Lord drew nearest at the conclusion of the plenary session of GC 36. I turn now to my third facet of the GC 36 experience: the body's considerations regarding the protection of minors and those who, because of particular vulnerability, are considered their equivalent. On September 10, 2014, while concluding my ministry on Borgo Santo

"Time and again, I heard the GC members and support staff speak fluent and eloquent Ignatian to one another, using deeds to express a brotherly love that words can never communicate effectively enough." —Grummer

Spirito 4, the Holy Father named me promoter of justice at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Much of this current mission concerns the canonical, juridical

oversight of cases concerning what are technically called *delicta graviora*—"more grave delicts"—among which the most well-known would regard clerics who have committed sins against the sixth commandment with minors.

I'd been involved in this work in a limited way since 1994, first on a local scale, in Chicago; then internationally, in my years in our Jesuit Curia; and then now for the universal church, at the Vatican. The preparatory work for GC 36, at province and later GC commission levels, had raised the abuse theme from various parts of the world in a couple of ways for members' consideration during the plenary session in Rome. And the body's autumn 2016 dialogue in Rome surfaced diverse opinions respectfully and patiently shared in various GC settings—in the congregation aula, in small groups, and in informal conversation. Over time, once our cooperation with grace broke the topic open, that dialogue went deeper than many of us were expecting, with a liberating and non-intimidating uncertainty as to whether GC 36 would say anything at all, even up to its closing hours.

As the congregation was closing, there were final votes to be taken, including assorted points on the then just lived-through revised *formulae* as well as a not-yet-existent statement on the protection of minors. As the current procurator general was on the floor leading the members in a series of final votes regarding further *formulae* revisions to be made, another member and I were asked to work up quickly a brief proposed text on the protection question. Upstairs in the GC aula mezzanine, as

he and I typed and edited away on a topic powerfully near to my current primary ministry—that is, the protection of minors—I could hear what was going on below on *formulae* revision matters, which was a significant piece of my prior primary ministry. Mind, heart, and adrenalin were pounding for me at that moment. In a half hour or so we came up with a mini-text—in fact, with two—to the happy sounds of good governance on *formulae* matters down below.

As we stood to leave the mezzanine that morning, and to take my colleague's laptop down to the dais in the aula for prompt discussion and vote on this brief text, I felt a wondrous uprising of inexplicable consolation. "I have to sit." I did, and I sobbed. Just sobbed. With the clock ticking. Motion, yes, but sometimes you just have to pause, sit, and sob. And then my GC companion and I went down to the aula floor—at his suggestion, I took his computer to present our draft to the chair—as *formulae* revision matters wrapped up and we moved on to the congregation's consideration of the few lines just described. In those hours and the next day or two, I carried a visceral sense of not one but two general congregations ending—or, I guess, in some way opening. There was a spiritual and, yes, canonical, ministerial convergence for me—personal, but corporate-based. So much had been in motion for the body—for the whole Society, for me—spanning two general congregations and the time between. The span is yet broader, of course. In grace and in faith we know that GC 36 is today what had its genesis in the first general congregation. As seen in this vehicle we call a general congregation, our way of proceeding and the patrimony of our *Constitutions* are still nourishing. The Lord is near. Motion.

4. Unity and Diversity

James E. Grummer (UMI app DIR)

My assignments and responsibilities in the forty-four years, one month, and eighteen days that had elapsed between my entrance day and the first plenary session of GC 36 gave me the opportunity to meet Jesuits from over thirty-five different provinces in their communities and places of ministry. At meetings of one sort or

another, I had the advantage, long before the convocation of GC 36, of making the acquaintance of at least one Jesuit from every province in the world. In addition to direct experience of the men and missions that form the Society of Jesus, a dozen years of reading letters and reports—to say nothing of daily formal and informal meetings about situations, apostolates, and individuals throughout the Society—provided me a broad and deep knowledge of the Society.

Furthermore, “*while there went / Those years and years by*” that seemed “*of world without event*,” through the Society’s process of formation, annual retreats, daily prayer, spiritual direction, and the theological updating I tried to do, God had taught me a thing or two about Ignatian and Jesuit spirituality. On one level or another, I thought I had seen it all, or had read it all, or at least heard about it all. I never expected to experience so many spiritual movements so deeply and so often as was the case for me during GC 36. God clearly had many more lessons for my heart and head.

Most of us are familiar with the phrase, “If you met one Jesuit, you met one Jesuit.” This implies that Jesuits are so individualistic by temperament and experience that they have nothing in common. Certainly, the Society’s diversity was breath-taking on the level of wardrobes and mother tongues; however, the content of our conversations and our way of being together revealed a much more significant and abiding unity. Our shared roots in the Spiritual Exercises, the Constitutions, and the Society’s history provided a common vocabulary and perspective that enabled us to work together quickly and easily. This became obvious in the first days of the congregation when some wanted to move as rapidly as possible to the election of the general, while others wanted to take more time before such an important event. When the members were asked to pray briefly about what God might be asking us to do in response to the diverse desires and viewpoints expressed as articulately, forcefully, and passionately as one might imagine, their immediate silence clearly indicated that everyone knew exactly what to do and how to do it.

The resulting vote and its enthusiastic reception confirmed for me the truth that Jesuits who put their minds to it can listen well to one another and to the One who calls us to companionship. Time and

again, I heard the GC members and support staff speak fluent and eloquent Ignatian to one another, using deeds to express a brotherly love that words can never communicate effectively enough. I learned more deeply during the congregation that the Society may have many different hands that sometimes seem to pull in different directions, while a single Heart unites us. Now I would say that to meet one Jesuit is to meet a unique individual who is profoundly incorporated into a body of like-minded and like-hearted men.

I found the prayerfulness of the congregation changing me throughout its sessions. The number of people around the world who took part in the daily morning prayer periods organized by Clemens Blattert and his band of musicians suggests that I was not the only one touched deeply during our times of communal prayer. Remembering major liturgical celebrations at the Gesù, Saint Peter's Basilica, the Church of the Holy Spirit, and Sant'Ignazio still reminds me of the power of art, architecture, and ritual to evoke the mystery of transcendence. Seeing Jesuits from around the world praying quietly in the Canisio garden, on the Curia rooftop, and in the chapel of adoration during the *murmuratio* before the election of the general, reminded me to pray more confidently, since all depends on God.

I had a personal experience of that Ignatian counsel while trying to organize an approach to a potentially pesky conflict. After wearing myself out with fruitless fretting, I finally had the good sense to say, "Jesus, if you want this done, you will have to tell me exactly what to do, because I cannot figure it out." Within seconds of raising my fist, a fresh solution sprang to mind that proved to be exactly the right thing to do. The congregation worked wonders for my prayer life.

In addition, seeing the GC in action convinced me more than ever that either Saint Ignatius was an organizational genius or he was particularly good at listening carefully in prayer so that God could tell him what to do. Or probably both. GC 36 provided me the experience of seeing again and again that the rules for discernment and the structures of governance with which Ignatius left us still work well five centuries later, when we have the good sense to use them. Even in this disenchanted and secularized age that Charles Taylor has described so well, people committed to trusting obedience based on carefully-discerned deci-

sions will never be disappointed. My experiences during the congregation deepened my realization that we have received a fantastic heritage that we can use for serving the church and the world.

I suppose I cannot avoid saying something about the experience of being vicar. Sitting in the big chair at the big table under the big screen in the center of the aula for two weeks certainly focused my attention on the Society and its spirituality. I had an extraordinarily privileged place to see the Society's diversity and unity, which included the generosity, idealism, prayerfulness, and astounding goodness of the men sent from the provinces to seek the good of the entire body. Throughout that fortnight, I urgently needed but graciously experienced the efficacy of prayer as never in my life. I watched with fascination and astonishment as the subtle brilliance of the Ignatian system of governance carried us forward despite our obvious inadequacies and persistent temptations to go astray. The brotherhood of the Society empowered me to do and be more than I ever imagined. I am forever different because of what God taught me through our fraternal bonds.

Every time I opened my eyes and ears throughout October and November of 2016, I had a new appreciation for the Society and Jesuit spirituality. Fraternal teasing, humble acts of generosity in the refectory, and extraordinary moments of grace, like Father Nicolás's resignation and Pope Francis's allocution in the aula, descended, in the words of the *Contemplatio*, "as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source." What treasures we have in the Society's members and Institute! I already knew that before the congregation began, of course, but now I know it much more profoundly. The God who undergirds the *magis* had more to teach me, and I am excited that the lessons continue.

5. Three Consolations

Herbert B. Keller (MAR)

Before I departed for Rome as a delegate to the Society's 36th General Congregation, I had heard from a few Jesuits who had been to previous congregations. While all of them had seasoned advi-

ce ranging from out-of-the-way churches in Rome I shouldn't miss, to restaurants I must visit, each of them also had a similar prediction for me. Based on their own lived experiences, each of them told me that the congregation would be among the most powerful moments in my life as a Jesuit. I can report now with certainty that their prediction was accurate. Certain moments of the congregation, by themselves, had the power to make a lasting impact on anyone. The resignation speech of Father Nicolás, the Mass at Saint Peter's to open the period of *murmuratio*, the Mass of the Holy Spirit preceding the election of Father General, the selection of Father Sosa, and the morning spent with Pope Francis, were all singular moments that were so filled with emotional, religious and historic significance that they were memorable on their own.

"The image that remains with me is that of Father Nicolás walking out of the doors of the aula and quietly going back to his room." —Keller

But there were other facets of the congregation that were equally powerful in their own way, and these are the three experiences upon which I would like to reflect now. Each of these experiences has had a strong impact on my life as a Jesuit and on my relationship with the Lord. Upon prayer and reflection on my time at GC 36, I see these as three themes that, since the congregation, have influenced both my spirituality and my sense of mission as a Jesuit.

1. Indifference and Openness

Early in the congregation, Father Adolfo Nicolás stood before the assembled members in the curia hall and submitted his resignation as superior general of the Society of Jesus. It was October 3, the feast of Saint Francis Borgia. In a steady tone of voice, Father Nicolás explained his reasons to the congregation. His words were full of strong conviction, spiritual reflection, and personal honesty. Above all, his words were full of a humility and a faith that spoke powerfully to each Jesuit in the hall. When the members deliberated upon his request and voted to accept his resignation, Father Nicolás returned to the hall briefly before departing. His resignation formally accepted, he left the hall to thunderous applause and much emotion among the assembled members. What struck me most then was the ease and sense of peace that Father Nicolás

exhibited at that moment. The image that remains with me is that of Father Nicolás walking out of the doors of the aula and quietly going back to his room. For me, that single moment spoke of the indifference and openness to which we aspire as sons of Ignatius. Here was a man who was peacefully stepping aside from one of the most powerful positions in our church because he believed that it was God's will and desire for him to do so. After all of the attention and notoriety associated with his position for all these years, he simply, and with great peace, went back to his room.

In the days of the congregation that followed, there would be much prayerful discussion on the qualities that we desired in a new general. There would be much reflection upon the documents we eventually produced and much give and take. Sometimes our work was full of great consolation and joy; at other times we needed to pray hard to discover God's light in work that could be tedious and time consuming. But for me, the grace that sustained me and encouraged me along the way was the grace of Adolfo Nicolás's sense of peace and indifference upon his resignation. I believe that his openness to God's will was a moment that defined and sustained General Congregation 36. For me personally, it is a moment that continues to bear great fruit in my own spiritual life, as I continue to ask God to help me grow in indifference and openness to His call.

2. On a Common Mission

One great spiritual consolation during these weeks of the congregation was a lived sense of sharing in a common mission in the Society. I believe that the members experienced this grace most intensely during the period of discernment that surrounded the *murmuratio* prior to our selection of Father Arturo Sosa as the next superior general. The graces of that prayerful period are indeed hard to put into words. At the core of that experience, however, was a tangible sense of being part of a spiritual discernment that led us to discover God's will for the Society. There is a beautiful prayer for the Mass of the Holy Spirit that preceded the *murmuratio*. In that verse we pray to God to allow us to "select the one You have chosen." I came to believe in the truth of those words and came to believe that this what the congregation was doing.

Even though the *murmuratio* was an intense experience of communal discernment, I believe that this spirit permeated the congregation. In our discussion, prayer, discernment and spiritual conversation, there was an abiding sense that our gathering was guided by God's Spirit and that the Spirit was actively working in the lives and hearts of the members gathered from around the world. Seeing how our common mission was incarnated in the lives of Jesuits from so many different cultures and countries throughout the world was, for me, a powerful, lived experience of the gift of unity that the Spirit brings. We certainly differ as Jesuits in the ways that we approach global realities and we differ in our experiences of the challenges facing our world. While not naively painting the congregation in colors of absolute unanimity and ignoring our inevitable differences, I found at the core of the experience men who were truly "united in mission." That realization was and continues to be for me a great consolation.

3. Asking for Consolation

Finally, I was powerfully struck and challenged by Pope Francis's message to the general congregation, specifically his call "to ask persistently for God's consolation."³ Francis called this the "specific task of the Society" —namely, to "console the Christian faithful and to help them in their discernment so that the enemy of human nature does not distract us from joy." In his talk to us, Francis defined joy as "constitutive of the Gospel," reminding us that "one cannot deliver good news with a sullen face." Importantly, for Francis: "joy is not a decorative 'addition' but a clear indicator of grace." I believe that Francis's prayer was reflected in the discussions and the documents of GC 36: "Pope Francis urges us to pray insistently for this consolation that Christ desires to give. Reconciliation with God is first and foremost a call to a profound conversion, for each Jesuit, and for all of us."⁴

³ "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus," General Curia of the Society of Jesus, Monday, October 24, 2016, accessed September 4, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161024_visita-compagnia-gesu.html. All quotations of this document come from this electronic source edition.

⁴ GC 36, d. 1, no. 17; *36th General Congregation Documents*, Private Edition (Rome: General Curia, 2017), 3/16.

Many times in my own life I believe that I have looked at the sense of consolation as a by-product or a result. I have viewed consolation, in the spirit of the Spiritual Exercises, as a state of mind or soul indicative of the presence of God in a given situation or the confirming grace that accompanied the result of a decision over which I had been praying. To seek God's consolation in and of itself is, for me, a new way of approaching the traditional, classic spiritual sense of consolation. I believe that Francis is suggesting that God's consolation is not only the by-product of seeking God's will, but, even more basically, "constitutive of the Gospel." It is a state of grace not only to be experienced as a result of discerning God's purpose, but a grace for which to pray, specifically and insistently, by name. God's gift to me of joy, therefore, not only signals His presence, but allows me to share in His active, redemptive work. It is for precisely this reason that Francis describes joy not only as an indicator of God's grace, but also "the specific task of the Society."

The three themes from GC 36 on which I have touched above have been sources of rich reflection in my own life as a Jesuit. To me, they have been a call to conversion. And at root, it is conversion—both individual and communal—that has always been the true aim of our congregations.

6. To Allow the Creator to Deal Immediately with the Creature

Hung T. Pham (UCS app UWE)

To assist the retreatant in maximizing the space of personal encounter with the divine, the author of the *Spiritual Exercises* recommends two points. First, for a greater disposition of oneself to receive graces and gifts from the divine, Ignatius insists that "an exercitant will achieve more progress the more he or she withdraws from all friends and acquaintances," so as to "live in the greatest possible solitude. . . . alone and secluded."⁵ Second, Ignatius encourages retreat-

⁵ *SpEx 20; The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. and ed. George E. Ganss,

ants to enter the Exercises “with great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord.”⁶ Both points aim “to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord.”⁷ Note, too, that the first point is focused on the external, the second on the internal. The first is about withdrawing, the second pertains to engaging.

The experience of attending General Congregation 36—which included being present in the aula, engaging in processes of discernment and decision, and benefiting from the insights of so many learned and holy men—taught me how such a privileged space of divine encounter had been incorporated into our highest form of governance. The experience of a general congregation can represent a concrete model for how to extend a similar space in our Jesuit apostolates and communities. It requires courage and generosity.

When I entered the aula for the first time, I was sobered by the Spartan ambiance and minimal décor. I saw no portraits or statues of Ignatius or the First Companions. In the middle of the room, there was only Jesus on the cross. There were, however, four painted panels by the Slovenian Jesuit Marko Ivan Rupnik. Now, typically, Rupnik’s mosaics depict biblical figures in bright colors. But these four canvasses were relatively minimalistic. There were no detailed figures, only a few, simple brush strokes descending on an opaque background. Each panel also contained a phrase from scripture or from Jesuit spirituality, but depicted so abstractly that they were difficult to read unless one looked closely.

But then I understood that the purpose of these canvasses was to provide a mysterious space of encounter. One banner read, “for in this *tent*, we groan, longing to be further clothed with our heavenly habitation.”⁸ The other banners seemed to hint at how the participants of the congregation might engage each other, and the directions in which that

SJ (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 28–29.

⁶ *SpEx* 5; *ibid.*, 22.

⁷ *SpEx* 15; *ibid.*, 26.

⁸ 2 Cor 5:2; *my italics*.

engagement might focus. One read *En todo amar y servir*, “in everything, to love and to serve.” Another contained a verse from the first letter of John (4:8), reminding participants of the foundation of Christian faith: “whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.” The fourth panel seemed to remind the congregation of the one principle and foundational direction: *a su divina majestad*—“to his divine majesty.”

The process of electing a new superior general well exemplifies how a congregation allows the creator to deal immediately with creature. Even after having deliberated among each other for four days, and

“The experience of a general congregation can represent a concrete model for how to extend a similar space in our Jesuit apostolates and communities.” —Pham

even after having sought “to be informed by those who are capable of supplying good information”—the period known as the *murmuratio*—members were expected to at-

tend the Mass of the Holy Spirit and to receive communion on the day of election.⁹ I was furthermore surprised to hear that we should make no decision until we have entered the aula and been locked into the place of the election, and again, that we should withhold our decision, and cast our votes, only after having observed one hour of silent prayer.¹⁰

Pope Francis’s address to the congregation was another occasion of leaving space for the Creator. In an off-script remark, he noted that “initiating processes is different from occupying spaces. The Society initiates processes and leaves spaces. This is important. Other religious occupy spaces, the monasteries. The Society initiates processes.” Here, I believe that the Pope was locating the unique charism of the Society within the long history of Christian religious life. In the beginning, the desert fathers and mothers encountered the divine in barren wasteland. Later, monasteries provided a communal locale for monks to encounter God. Still later, mendicants extended the place of encounter to include cities and universities.

⁹ *Constitutions* 697.

¹⁰ *Const.* 694, 701; *The Constitutions and Complementary Norms of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 337–38.

But Ignatius was convinced that an encounter between the divine and the individual takes place in the heart of every individual. For Jesuits, the encounter makes one free to be sent anywhere in the world to labor in the vineyard of the Lord. For that reason, Jerome Nadal told Jesuits that “the world is our home.”

Since Jesuits are not supposed to limit themselves to any one space—that space being either physical or emotional—we encounter God anywhere and everywhere, in ever-changing landscapes under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Pope Francis continued his remarks, that the “rules of thinking with the church are not to be read as precise instructions . . . [they should not be used] to justify a controversial point, but rather to open up space in which the Spirit could work in his time.”

The members of General Congregation 36 explicitly confirmed that God took the initiative in allowing us to encounter him directly and immediately. Decree 1, “Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice,” was inspired by the First Companions’ failure to find passage to Jerusalem. Having recognized their powerlessness, they committed themselves once again to be men of prayer, seeking divine guidance as to where they should go.

In a similar way, the decrees of the GC 36 engage the space created for Jesuits by God, who has called us to share in the divine service. In return, we might imagine the creation of new spaces with and for others. Like construction workers who labor in the background to repair and improve city streets and highways, the Thirty-Sixth General Congregation likewise provides the Society a vital infrastructure of Ignatian discernment: the means to allow space for the creator to deal immediately with the creature.

7. Transformation of Spiritual Conversation

John W. McCarthy (CDA)

The only reason we come together in Jesuit community is to go out—on mission.” These words, uttered by a former provincial to me and to my brother novices way back in the early 1980s, still

resonate with me. For some reason, I still remember them, after all these years. Maybe it is because, at that time, I did not believe them. The provincial seemed too definitive. There had to be more to community life, I thought. Surely, it was more than simply a means to something else that was supposedly worthier of our care and concern.

GC 36 was convinced that God was calling the entire Society to a “profound spiritual renewal.”¹¹ For the congregation, that renewal centered on our understanding of our religious identity—our identity as companions on mission rather than the nature of the mission itself. The conversion at hand was not about the apostolate per se, but with our communal life as the foundation of mission and identity, and indeed as mission itself.¹²

The celebration of the Eucharist has been compared to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. People of all walks of life gather on a regular basis, they profess who they are to one another, they share stories, and hopefully leave strengthened at the end of the gathering—only to do it all over again. In both cases, we profess our limitations, our sin, our poverty of spirit. Only then can we continue with the gathering. Only then are we open to personal and communal transformation.

Why should that not be the case with Jesuit communities? As a group, despite our varying educations and talents, and maybe because of these very conditions, why would we consider ourselves immune to the same dynamic at work in the gathering of the faithful or a gathering of alcoholics? The only difference is that we can mask it a bit better. Our external successes and the accolades of others are often too successful at dulling the awareness of our own poverty of spirit.

¹¹ GC 36, d. 1, no. 18; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 4/17.

¹² Decree 1 of GC 36 advances the insight of GC 35 that “Jesuit identity and Jesuit mission are linked by community; indeed, identity, community, and mission are a kind of triptych shedding light on how our companionship is best understood” (GC 35, d. 2, no. 19; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ [St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009], 740). See also Urbano Valeri, SJ, “Identity, Community, Mission: Reflections around ‘A Kind of Triptych,’” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 41, no. 3 (2010): 54–66.

To some, the quest of religious identity may seem a rather profligate waste use of time, given the myriad intractable problems facing humanity, indeed all creation. Some may be tempted to say, “Forget this navel-gazing, and let us get on with life and work!” I admit, that might at times seem the best option. But, for whatever reason—dare I incur the fault of the Holy Spirit!—the members of GC 36 seemed to have very little appetite for the details of mission. When the question of mission did surface, it gained little traction. Something deeper was afoot. That is not to say that the members of GC 36 were allergic to the call of mission. Far from it. *Postulata* from the provincial congregations were strong in their engagement of the many apostolic challenges and opportunities facing us. But mission was not the central *raison d’être* of our gathering.

When compared to GC 35, nothing new in terms of mission was defined. The tripartite mission of reconciliation announced by GC 35 was simply reaffirmed and strengthened by GC 36—mission of reconciliation with God, within humanity, and with creation.¹³

What *was* new was the congregation’s insight that our apostolic mission flowed from a concrete, “discerning community with open horizons.”¹⁴ This insight is subtle and easily missed. Indeed, I wonder if this may be the reason for the rather benign and muted reaction to the GC documents that my provincial and I sensed during our post-GC 36 tour of the province. This focus on our “religious identity” seemed ill-suited to a group of men intent on setting the world on fire with renewed vigor and zeal.¹⁵

In his address to the members of GC 36, Pope Francis gifted us with what we may have least expected, but what we probably needed the most. He brought us back to the *Formula of the Institute*, to the foundational inspiration of Saint Ignatius and his first companions. The Holy Father had nothing to say on specific mission directives, but much to say on our religious identity. He focused on Jesuit religious identity as the essential ground of our apostolic mission.

¹³ GC 35, d. 3, nos. 18–36; GC 36, d. 1, nos. 21–30.

¹⁴ GC 36, d. 1, no. 7; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 2/15.

¹⁵ GC 35, dd. 1 and 2.

I am very grateful for the Holy Father's challenge to us. No obvious, specific mission fell from his lips. Some of us may have been more comfortable if the pope had given us a peg upon which to hang our apostolic hats. Others may have hoped for a papal-approved plan of action. That may indeed have been more palatable than an invitation to reflect deeply on our way of proceeding as consecrated men. I, for one, was pleased that the pope had no mission plan to hand us. In my mind, that would have been rather paternalistic; and, indeed, a failure of hope in the Society and in the global Ignatian family. Instead, he called us back to our roots—to seeking intensely the consolation of decision making, in the shadow of the cross, within the community of the followers of Christ, the church. No better way to eschew the temptations of honor, prestige and glory, both individually and communally.

The members accepted this challenge of the Holy Father. The title of Decree 1 says it all. We identify primarily as companions, and we also identify with what that means in terms of community and apostolic discernment. It is a development and deepening of the notion of community as mission first formulated by GC 35.¹⁶ In fact, the members expressed explicitly their understanding that we needed to focus not on what we should do, but rather on how God invites us to share in his great work.¹⁷

The opening paragraphs of decree 1 are clear and consistent in their call for a conversion of communal apostolic life. The Ignatian icon presented is not that of Ignatius the pilgrim, nor of Ignatius in Rome as the administrator of a global apostolic body. Rather, the *fil conducteur* or main theme presented for our appreciation is that of Ignatius and his companions in Venice.¹⁸ It is before the Society of Jesus receives papal approbation. It is the time of a band of brothers—priests, learned and poor—seeking, discerning a way forward—together, as one body.

Note the themes of community and communal discernment that mark the opening paragraphs of decree 1. To reiterate, we are defined

¹⁶ GC 35, d. 2, no. 19; d. 3, no. 41.

¹⁷ GC 36, d. 1, no. 3.

¹⁸ GC 36, d. 1, nos. 4–6.

as “a discerning community with open horizons.”¹⁹ We are primarily a body, and a body that discerns together. If we forget this, then we “lose our identity as Jesuits and our ability to bear witness to the Gospel.”²⁰ It is not what we do, or our abilities, that testify to the Good News, but how we are bound in and with Christ, as one body of brothers on mission.

Furthermore, this community, often defined—and, dare I say, lived—in solely functionalized or instrumentalized terms, is proclaimed as the “privileged place of apostolic discernment.”²¹ Furthermore, community is the “concrete place in which we live as friends in the Lord” — places of “encounter and sharing” — “homes for the Reign of God.”²²

At the heart of this community, the congregation presents spiritual conversation as essential to communal apostolic discernment.²³ In fact, the congregation offers spiritual conversation as a key tool to animate communal apostolic discernment.²⁴ For me, this is central to living concretely “community as mission.” Spiritual conversation provides a simple, workable, practical method that, if trusted and turned into a habit, can help transform how we decide what we will do and how we will live together. Spiritual conversation concretely bridges the triptych of Jesuit identity, Jesuit community, and Jesuit mission.

¹⁹ GC 36, d. 1, no. 7; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 2/15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ GC 36, d. 1, no. 8; *ibid.*, 2/15. For a lucid treatment of an “instrumentalized and functionalized” Jesuit community, see Michael J. Buckley, SJ, “Mission in Companionship: Of Jesuit Community and Communion,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 11, no. 4 (1979): 1–50. See also P. Anil Pereira, SJ, “Jesuit Community Life” (master’s thesis, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2016).

²² GC 36, d. 1, nos. 9, 10, 13; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 2/15–3/16.

²³ GC 36, d. 1, no. 12; Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “On Apostolic Discernment in Common,” *Acta Romana* 19 (1987): 720–40. See also John Pradeep Kantharaj, SJ, “Ignatian Communal Discernment and the Jesuits Today: A Reflection in the Light of General Congregations 31–35” (master’s thesis, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 2015); *ESDAC (Exercices Spirituels de Discernement Apostolique en Commun) Manual for Facilitators*, “Welcoming and Building Communion Together” (2017).

²⁴ GC 36, d. 1, no. 12

To be clear, however, spiritual conversation is not talking about spiritual things, or even “faith sharing”—that most dreaded of activities for many a Jesuit. Rather, it is about the quality of listening and the quality of speaking. It means paying attention to the spiritual, affective movements within oneself and within the other during conversation. It is a reverence and a radical welcome for what is said by the other.

Two main dispositions frame spiritual conversation—on the one hand, active listening; and on the other, speaking from the heart. Active listening intends to seek and understand others as they are—to listen with an open, hospitable, non-judgmental heart. Speaking from the heart intends a sincere expression of one’s self—of one’s experience, feelings, and thoughts. Coupled with some practical rules of various rounds of speaking and listening, check-ins, and individual prayer, spiritual conversation can provide a radically simple but seldom used method of discerning conversation. It takes practice and time to gain trust and facility, and doing so assumes a regular personal prayer life and the practice of the examen.

For the past several years, we in the English Canada Province have been using spiritual conversation in various meetings and attempts at communal discernment. Honestly, it has borne fruit. While we are by no means experts at spiritual conversation and communal apostolic discernment, we seek their transformative effects. And as a result, the quality of conversation, community life, and apostolic life has benefited immensely. It has engendered a depth to our conversation, community life, and mission. But like any virtue, it demands engagement, time, energy, and commitment. It can fail. But, it also can succeed—and wonderfully so.

8. Communal Discernment

Michael C. McFarland (UNE)

As I reflect on the 36th General Congregation, I am reminded of what a great privilege it was to work with provincials, members of the curia and other distinguished Jesuits from every part

of the world. Seeing how they worked together, with their many differences in experience, language, culture, politics, economic and social circumstances, and ecclesiology, to reach a consensus on critical issues affecting the future of the Society, was a revelation of the power of Ignatian discernment.

The most obvious example of the discernment process was the election of a new superior general for the Society. This was the most important decision the congregation was faced with and the reason it was called. It followed a well-defined process that had been refined and confirmed through centuries of experience. As unconventional and unpromising as the process seems to those who have not experienced it before, it has proved remarkably effective through the ages, because it contains the three elements that are most important for genuine discernment.

"But electing a general was the easy part: coming to agreement on a set of documents posed a much greater challenge." —McFarland

First, it was carried out in an atmosphere of intense prayer, both structured and unstructured. The process leading up to the election began with a concelebrated Mass at Saint Peter's, presided over by the senior member of the congregation. Each day of the *murmuratio* began with prayer together and ended with benediction, followed by Mass in the various language groups. All day in between, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the main chapel of the curia; and at any time, there would be a dozen or more members there for silent reflection and prayer. The day of the election began with an early concelebrated Mass of the Holy Spirit in the Church of the Holy Spirit across the street from the curia. Once the congregation gathered in the aula, after a short exhortation, we sat together in silent reflection and prayer for an hour. Before any voting took place, all took a solemn oath to vote according to their conscience; and those managing the election swore to carry out their duties with fidelity and integrity. These solemn rituals, in addition to invoking God's help and guidance, were a constant reminder that we were not voting by ourselves or for ourselves, but were intent on discovering and following the will of God.

Second, the *murmuratio* led us to surrender not only to God, but also to one another. The four days of focused one-on-one conversations forced the members both to open up and to listen intently and reverently to one another. Whether it was self-revelation or the sharing of experience and wisdom about others, the degree of honesty and perceptiveness was truly moving and strengthened the bonds of understanding and trust among the members. This intense period of personal encounter built a strong foundation of common knowledge and a growing sense of solidarity across the Society going into the election.

Finally, the unusual structure of the election process, with no slate of candidates, no advocacy, no parties or platforms, along with the constant emphasis on prayer and reflection and the very personal sharing that took place in the *murmuratio*, jarred the members out of a purely intellectual, analytic mode of decision making into a deeper, more holistic mode that followed the heart as well as the head. At that point, it became a genuine discernment and not just a vote. As a result, though the members may have started in many different places, they moved quickly to a consensus. The election of Father Sosa was announced shortly after noon, barely three hours after the members were cloistered in the aula. And all of the members, whatever their individual opinions, seemed to find genuine peace and joy in the outcome.

But electing a general was the easy part: coming to agreement on a set of documents posed a much greater challenge. Prior to the congregation, based on the work of province congregations and the postulates submitted, the *coetus praeivus* had set up two commissions expected to produce major documents: one on governance, and one on life and mission. The latter was asked to integrate themes that previous congregations had dealt with separately. In the months before the congregation assembled in Rome, the commissions worked diligently to produce initial drafts of their documents, which they posted for consideration by the members. These drafts were torn to shreds when exposed to discussion in the aula. Subsequent drafts attempting to respond to the concerns did not fare much better. A cloud of desolation hung over the members.

Many found the message in the documents less than compelling. Some wondered if the congregation had anything worthwhile to say. To a large degree, the Society was still dealing with unfinished business

from the 35th General Congregation rather than striking out in radical new directions, so there was not much in those drafts that excited the members. Nevertheless, there was still a sense among many that the congregation owed it to the rest of the Society to respond to the input received from provinces and individuals and to provide the guidance and impetus to keep the Society moving forward.

As the coordinating committee, which directed the day-by-day work of the congregation, struggled to find a more constructive dynamic, its members hit upon two changes that proved to be helpful. First, they appointed drafting committees, most of whose members were not on the original commissions, to produce new drafts of the governance and mission and identity documents. Because most members of these committees were not so closely tied to the original drafts, they had more freedom to consider fresh approaches to getting their messages across.

Second, the coordinating committee organized a different method for the entire congregation to engage the texts. When a new draft of one of the documents came out, the members were asked first to pray over it individually, paying attention to the movements of the spirits—their consolations and desolations—as they did so. Then the members were assigned to small, mixed-language groups to reflect on their prayer experience. Each group was asked to go around the circle three times. The first time, each member was to share his experience of praying over the text. Next, each was to reflect on what he heard in listening to the others. Finally, the group worked together to recognize and articulate the major themes that had emerged in the reflection. The results from each group were then brought to the whole group and, after a short and constrained discussion in common, sent to the drafting committee for incorporation in a new version of the text.

Putting prayer and reflection, especially the testing of the spirits, at the center of the process moved the members beyond a purely analytical-critical stance and helped them recognize the major themes that they found meaningful and life-giving. Moreover, the discipline of listening attentively to one another helped them to find the spirit that unified them while sensitizing them to the diversity of concerns arising from different experiences and circumstances. The result was a more constructive atmosphere in which the texts could be shaped. That, along

with the patient work of the drafting committees, resulted in documents that said something worthwhile and earned the support of almost all the members.

It was hard to see at the time, when we were so immersed in gathering information, weighing alternatives, and critiquing texts, but it is very clear in reflecting back on the experience that the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work in our deliberations. Furthermore, and most important, it is not as if the Spirit was directing us from the outside. There was no external revelation or sign that moved the congregation. Rather the Spirit was at work from within our messy, difficult human thought and reflection, speaking and listening, weighing and deciding. That is the insight at the heart of Ignatian prayer: that the Spirit speaks from within if we have the freedom, humility, and trust truly to listen.

Thus, the primary lesson of this congregation for me was that this can occur in large groups as well as in individual discernment. Interestingly, this is something that GC 36 asks us to practice in our communities and apostolates.

9. Creating Space to Discern

Ronald A. Mercier (ucs)

In the *Contemplatio ad amorem*, Saint Ignatius proposes that a retreatant consider “how God works and labors for me.”²⁵ The *Contemplatio* as a discreet unit at the end of the retreat prepares one to offer oneself completely to labor with God in the great work of salvation. Attending, then, to the traces of God’s action represents a pivotal moment in discernment.

Within that framework, four moments from the 36th General Congregation stand out for me as central elements of God’s labor and as indications of a way of laboring with the Lord.

²⁵ *SpEx 236; The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl, SJ (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 103.

- The *murmuratio*, that distinctive Jesuit way of electing a general superior, did not simply represent an effective way of effecting its goal, but set the stage for the congregation by the prayerful, personal encounters among Jesuits who could know one another as friends in the Lord.
- The morning with the Holy Father, coming amid the *ad negotia* phase, similarly opened a space of encounter. While we had expected some “plan of action,” we were instead invited anew into a personal reflection on our shared charism for the sake of the world.
- As the members struggled with the text of decree 1, we engaged a process used by the English Canada Province, with time for prayer followed by spiritual conversation, leading to a gathering of the fruits of the reflection. We knew one another not simply as those drafting a text but as men seeking the Lord together.
- The rapid discernment that led to Witnesses of Friendship and Reconciliation again invited us to share how the stories of our brothers in zones of conflict had moved our hearts. This discourse not only led to the text that emerged but also placed both decree 1 and decree 2 in a richer, prayerful context, rooted in the experience of shared prayer and witness to the vitality of our charism.

All four moments shared important characteristics, not only for the congregation but, I would wager, for the discernment that will flow from GC 36: a prayerful context, encounter with the other as an experience of shared identity and mission, a witness to holiness as a component of our common life.

At the outset, the preparations for GC 36 had sought a more efficient way to accomplish its tasks than the seemingly endless process of GC35. In retrospect, that focus served the congregation poorly in terms of its desired effect. On the other hand, it emphasized anew for the members the distinctly Jesuit way of proceeding, recognizing the *murmuratio* not simply as a way of proceeding for one purpose—that is, the election of a general—but as a pattern of communal discernment, effective even though it appears inefficient. The decrees from the congregation make

this point as they call the members of the Society to recover the way in which the first fathers, in Venice, addressed a changing reality—not as a form of antiquarianism, but as a graced way to approach the challenges facing the Society today. The three remaining elements mentioned above surface in the decrees in important places. Each of them refers not only to an inner dynamic of Jesuit life but also to a broader apostolic reality. We can take each of them in turn.

First, the expression “encounter with the other” captures the key experiences in the congregation. More to the point, though, the theme of encounter undergirds the logic of decree 1. The word *encounter* occurs five times in the decree, while the related term *closeness* occurs six times.

“Our ability to grow as discerning communities is linked directly to engagement with the poor.” —Mercier

The first usage is particularly important: “In our Jesuit community life, we should leave room for encounter and sharing.”²⁶ As at the congregation itself, the possibility of understanding God’s will for the Society passes through a community life rooted in real, personal encounter among Jesuits. The invitation to speaking humbly and listening attentively invites a mode of living together in depth that provides the conditions for the possibility of communal apostolic discernment. While this sort of discernment has truthfully been distant from the normal pattern of our lives, the experience of the congregation sees a patient work of creating communities of encounter as vitally important for discerning the future.

Parallel to that, however, lies the question of “closeness”—the other form of encounter. Here, decree 1 focuses on real engagement with the poor—with “crucified humanity.”²⁷ This dynamic has a privileged location, rooted in the example of the companions in Venice but today also opening a space in which to listen for God’s call. For the members of GC 36, the memory of such encounters in their own lives and the yearning to be back in contact represented a rich source of reflection and of connection with one another. The encounter with our brothers

²⁶ GC 36, d. 1, no. 10; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 3/16.

²⁷ GC 36, d. 1, no. 31; *ibid.*, 6/19.

in conflict zones through the witness of Jesuits from many parts of the world moved us to understand the full implications of the call to reconciliation found in schematic form in decree 1. Similarly, we draw close to a wounded world and hear another summons to reconciliation—here, with creation. Nor are the “encounters” with other Jesuits and the “closeness to the poor” disconnected: together, they foster communities that are “‘homes’ for the Reign of God.”²⁸

Not surprisingly, the relation of these two encounters leads directly to another element that we knew at the congregation: the encounter with the Lord. That prayerful dimension brings together communal dialogue and encounter with the poor and marginalized. Decree 1 affirms boldly “that there is no authentic familiarity with God if we do not allow ourselves to be moved to compassion and action by an encounter with the Christ who is revealed in the suffering, vulnerable faces of people, indeed in the suffering of creation.”²⁹ Our ability to grow as discerning communities is linked directly to engagement with the poor. GC 36 deliberately linked our relationship with the Lord with the depth of our encounters.

That basic dynamic came through most powerfully in the discussions of Jesuits working in zones of conflict—discussions that occupied several days of the last week of GC 36. The words at the end of paragraph 4 of the document *Witnesses of Friendship and Reconciliation* capture the impact of the discussions that bring together the points already discussed: “your ‘offering of great price’ contributes to the strength and efficacy of the Society all over the world.”³⁰ The prayerful reflection together on the witness of those who live our charism so well provided a graced context within which we could vote on documents and amendments. It reminded us of who we are but more to the point placed both decrees in a discerning context. When taken together with the other moments I have mentioned, including the encounter with Pope Francis, who so embodied for us our charism, that reflection on

²⁸ GC 36, d. 1, no. 13; *ibid.*, 3/16.

²⁹ GC 36, d. 1, no. 20; *ibid.*, 4/17.

³⁰ GC 36, Other Documents, “*Witnesses of Friendship and Reconciliation*”; *ibid.*, 1/30.

our brothers in danger deepened the experience of a community of discernment. It affirmed us in our identity as Jesuits and gave flesh to the broad sweep of the call for reconciliation in the context of personal and communal renewal.

Those dynamics give me pause in contemplating the impact of GC 36 on the apostolic life of the province and the Society. Of course, we have important decisions to make that have long-term implications for the life and mission of individual provinces and the Society. Yet the provinces could face the same temptation as the congregation: to focus on the practical matters at hand—decisions to make—rather than hearing the challenge of developing communities of discernment, which are part of our legacy but not of our contemporary reality. The multiple emphases we encounter—with the Lord, with one another, with the marginalized—form essential elements in such growth; so too does the encounter with our partners in ministry, with whom we labor.

This emphasis on personal and communal conversion by no means implies, of course, that one put to the side the important apostolic discernment and planning that we need. Rather, I find here an invitation to a mutually-reinforcing process of understanding God's call today. Without a clear commitment to the hard work of conversion, apostolic discernment could flounder; without a clear apostolic focus, however, personal and communal conversion could become a narrow introspection that belies the bold vision of the first fathers.

GC 36 left me with a sense of multi-dimensional work at hand. At the same time, the sense of the Spirit at work in moments of prayerful encounter with one another in the service of the mission provides a great source of hope. The question now becomes how to help the two halves of decree 1 to grow in dynamic interaction. GC35 with its call to "community as mission" as part of the triptych laid the foundation; the challenge now remains to build upon it.



10. Back to Fundamentals

Thomas D. Stegman (UMI app UNE)

The commissioned artwork of Marko Ivan Rupnik, a Slovenian Jesuit, immediately caught my attention the first time I entered the newly renovated aula. As Hung Pham points out in his own essay, Marko Ivan's four painted panels—brightly-hued in reds, oranges, and yellows—have subtle script near the bottom. Close inspection revealed that the writing was short phrases from the *Spiritual Exercises* (e.g., *en todo amar y servir*) as well as some citations from the New Testament. One of those citations, from Paul, proclaims the wonders of the “new creation” God has brought about through Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

As one who studies and teaches the Pauline letters, I have always been drawn to the fifth chapter of Second Corinthians, which contains some of Paul's most weighty theology. As the congregation progressed, I found myself reflecting more and more on the paragraph following 2 Cor 5:17—namely, 5:18–6:2, where the Apostle writes about God's work of reconciliation and the gift of the ministry of reconciliation to the church. In fact, decree 1 is bracketed by the words at the beginning and end of this paragraph. Just beneath the title reads, “all this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). And the closing words of the decree are those of 2 Cor 6:2b: “Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!”

But more than quotations, it is the content of decree 1 that evokes the wealth of material found in 2 Cor 5:18–6:2. In addition to its use of reconciliation as a leitmotif, the decree draws on Ignatius's beautiful image of God laboring on our behalf, and sets forth God's invitation to us to participate in the work of reconciliation. In terms of the latter, the document alludes to Paul's use of *synergoi*—that is, to the divine empowerment to be “co-laborers” with God (1 Cor 3:9, cited in footnote 8; cf. 2 Cor 6:1). Even more, Jesus's self-giving love on the cross (cf. 2 Cor 5:21) as the paradoxical source of God's power undergirds much of what we participants prayed and reflected on, and what went into the decree.

These themes were prominent in Pope Francis's allocution to us early in the *ad negotia* phase of the congregation. It was striking to me how the pope called us back to the fundamentals of our spirituality. His appeal to allow ourselves to be moved by the love of Christ manifested on the cross called to mind the colloquy of the First Week before the crucifix, especially the third question: What ought I to do for Christ in light of such love and mercy poured forth for me?³¹ Francis's counsel to pray intensely for the grace of consolation—for the love and joy that radiate from the risen Lord—was a reminder of one of his constant themes: the joy of the gospel. I cannot think of a more practical prayer. To beg for this grace is to pray to live each day with my will aligned more with God's; and, in so doing, to experience the joy and peace of God's Spirit. Of course, the gift is not just for our sake, but is to be shared with others. As Francis poignantly reminded us, "mercy is not an abstraction but a lifestyle consisting in concrete gestures."³²

The call to the basics of our spirituality is also a summons to humility. Adolfo Nicolás modeled a salutary example of humility at the beginning of the congregation, as he related to us instances of diminishment he had recently experienced. The image of Father Nicolás taking his seat among us in the aula, arranged in alphabetical order, after the vote that received his resignation was one I will never forget. So too was his decision, following the election of Arturo Sosa as Father General, to leave the aula—an act designed to give the congregation fuller freedom in our deliberations. Similarly, decree 1 sets a tone of humility in the evocation of the meeting of the first companions in Venice. Rather than recall the vows at Montmartre, Ignatius's vision at La Storta, or the official founding of the Society, decree 1 takes us to a moment when the first companions, having been frustrated in their attempt to go to the Holy Land, were vulnerable. They were led to rely even more on God's lead, which compelled them to more intense discernment of what the Lord was calling them to do.

³¹ *SpEx* 53.

³² "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus."

In addition to the evocation of the first companions in Venice, decree 1 sends out an important signal with its order of presentation. Notice that the document treats the theme of a discerning community before expounding on our life of faith, thereby giving prominence to our communal identity. Similar to the biblical perspective of Paul, the emphasis falls on community life and not on individuals. While decree 1 was not written for the express purpose of giving flesh to Peter-Hans Kolvenbach's challenge to live Jesuit community as mission—a call taken up by GC 35—it does offer plenty of fodder for reflection on this topic. My hope is that we take this offer.

I presently live at the Saint Peter Faber Jesuit Community in Brighton, Massachusetts, which is connected with Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. The community is divided into eight small communities. The small community where I live has nine members, from seven different countries representing four continents. We are truly multi-cultural. But are we *inter*-cultural? And even more importantly, are we deepening our bonds as brothers in the Lord? The way toward such deepening is the spiritual conversation for which decree 1 calls: "the exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply."³³ We have the opportunity to emulate the first companions—surely a diverse cast of characters!—in our commitment to one another, in sharing how the Lord is working in our lives, and in being joyful ministers of the gospel. Such a commitment, I hope, can go beyond weekly community meetings and permeate our lives together, as in dinner conversation.

The diverse makeup of the Faber Jesuit Community also offers an opportunity to bear witness to God's work of reconciliation among us. At our best, our ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic differences are not causes of division.³⁴ Rather, they are part of the rich mosaic of our unity-in-diversity that has its source of union in our spiritual resources, not least the *Spiritual Exercises*. To be frank, what most threatens to divide are differences across the theological spectrum, and especially around liturgy. But can we let our dedication to being true friends in the

³³ GC 36, d. 1, no. 12; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 3/16.

³⁴ On this point, see, for example, Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:13.

Lord—a dedication rooted in our identity as members of the Company of Jesus—trump the differences? Our participation in the ministry of reconciliation will be more authentic when we embody reconciliation among ourselves. Like charity, reconciliation begins at home.

So, too, does collaboration. Decree 2 acknowledges, while listing the challenges in collaboration, that a “particular difficulty can be the lack of genuine collaboration among Jesuits—individuals, institutions, communities, Provinces, and Conferences.”³⁵ That is an acknowledgment that should give us reason to pause. The same decree calls for greater cooperation among Jesuits and our institutions through networking. Jesuit theology centers are a natural place for such cooperation to happen. In fact, there have already been some important initiatives. But there is so much potential to do more to enhance theological education in a global context. As the dean of the STM, I am challenged by decree 2 to keep opportunities at the forefront of my prayer and thinking, rather than get bogged down and discouraged by the obstacles and difficulties that naturally arise when discussing the practicalities involved.

Rupnik’s panels in the aula—with their fiery yellows, oranges, and reds—radiated energy, light, and warmth. The experience of GC 36 is one that will be etched in my heart for the rest of my life. I hope that we Jesuits allow the fruits of the congregation—especially Decree 1—to kindle within us the fire and love that animated the first companions in Venice. If we open our hearts to these graces, we will find ourselves becoming more effective instruments in God’s ongoing work of reconciliation in bringing about the “new creation.” Now is indeed the acceptable time.

³⁵ GC 36, d. 2, no. 7; *36th General Congregation Documents*, 2/23.

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