

Structuring the Spirit

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The Jesuit Curia is located on Borgo S. Spirito, just steps from the Vatican, in Rome. This photo (taken from the roof of the Curia) shows the back side of the Curia and its gardens. The small building with a white roof is the Jesuit archives. The dome of St. Peter's is in the background.

Each year, Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, receives roughly 18,000 letters. Legitimate letters. Not promotional postcards for satellite TVs or new credit cards. Not e-mail. Letters. 18,000. And he reads each of them.

Fr. Kolvenbach is the 29th superior general of the Society of Jesus. St. Ignatius, who was the first superior general, often referred to the Society of Jesus as a body, of which the superior general is, both literally and metaphorically, the head.

Today over 20,000 Jesuits serve in 127 countries on 6 continents. They run hundreds of high schools and universities. They educate thousands of young people every year. They write, publish, counsel, study, teach, research, preach, broadcast, film, photograph, pray, administrate, govern, celebrate liturgy, direct retreats, and above all walk in solidarity with the poor every day.

It's Fr. General's responsibility to ensure that these 20,000 Jesuits, who hail from radically different geographic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, are cared for and remain united in their shared mission and purpose to

serve souls "for the greater glory of God," as St. Ignatius wrote in his *Constitutions*.

It's an enormous job for one man. Were it not for the wisdom and writings of St. Ignatius, the job would be nearly impossible and the Society of Jesus would look nothing like it does today.

Ignatius's Contribution

Ignatius is most often remembered for *The Spiritual Exercises*, a set of meditations he wrote after his conversion from a vain soldier to a humble servant of God. He also wrote *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, a document that gets much less attention than *The Spiritual Exercises*, but has had a similarly profound impact on the world.

In 1540, Pope Paul III formally approved the Society of Jesus. Ignatius Loyola was voted the Society's superior general on the first ballot, but insisted on a revote. He was elected unanimously on the second vote and became, in the blink of an eye, a career administrator. Though Ignatius had great love for teaching catechism to children



St. Ignatius' rooms and office in Rome were adjacent to the Church of the Gesu, shown as it existed during his life. Ignatius' tomb is in the church.

and ministering to the poor in Roman hospitals, he spent most of the rest of his life managing the Society of Jesus from a small office and apartment in central Rome next to the Gesu Church.

Ignatius's experience as the Society's first superior general helped him understand the need for a set of guidelines or constitutions. The Society had only ten members when it was first founded. They were friends and companions. Ignatius knew their minds and hearts and they knew his. Governing them was essentially a question of directing them to pursue the greatest good for the greatest number and occasionally reining them in if they lost their focus.

Since Ignatius didn't have the benefit of e-mail, telephones, or airplanes, he governed the Society by writing letters. As General, he required each member to write regularly to update him on their progress and the challenges they encountered. Ignatius dispatched new assignments, advice, and spiritual counsel in his letters. [editor's note: thousands of letters written by Ignatius and his early Jesuits are archived at the Jesuit Curia in Rome].

Until 1544, the number of Jesuits was limited to 60 by the Society's founding "charter". When, with papal approval, that restriction was lifted, scores of young men clamored to join the Society. By the late 1540's, there were hundreds of Jesuits spread out across the world. The Society's growth presented a great challenge for Ignatius, who no longer knew all of the Jesuits personally and struggled to keep up his correspondence with them.

He responded by developing in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus an extremely precise blueprint for how the Society of Jesus should be structured and governed. In them he addressed nearly every facet of Jesuit life: admitting new members, caring for old members, accepting assignments from superiors, living the vows, the personal character of Jesuits, uniting dispersed members,

the governmental structure of the Society, and the need for Jesuits around the world to remain united in hearts and minds.

Ignatius's plan for the Society worked.

As evidence, consider the fact that in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis there are hundreds of thousands of alumni of Jesuit colleges and universities. Many of them attended Loyola University Chicago or Xavier University in Cincinnati, the Chicago Province schools. But others attended Marquette or Georgetown or John Carroll or Creighton. Some may have attended Loyola Marymount or Boston College. And still others attended Jesuit schools in other countries like Peru, Chile, France, or India. If you gathered all these people in a room and asked them to describe their education and the Jesuits they knew in school, you'd get very similar answers. While there are certainly cultural differences between Scranton, PA, and Delhi, India, the Jesuits teaching in those two places are united in the same mission.

That's exactly what Ignatius wanted. In writing the *Constitutions* he was addressing issues that executives at major businesses are still dealing with today. He knew that the Society could not thrive, or even survive, without the union of minds and hearts of all its members. Today, ensuring that union is Fr. Kolvenbach's responsibility.

But one man can't do it alone.

Ignatius knew that. He himself struggled mightily to do it as the Society grew to more than 1,000 members in his lifetime. In 1547, he appointed a Secretary General to help him manage the flow of correspondence.

Governing the Modern Society

The Society is no longer governed by two men writing letters by hand. The Society's headquarters have moved from Ignatius' original office to the Jesuit Curia, a block long Jesuit community and office complex

on Borgo S. Spirito across the street from the Vatican.

Today, some 70 Jesuits live at the Curia and directly assist with the governance of the Society. Those working directly with Fr. General at the Curia are divided into three groups.

First is the group of major officials who advise Fr. General. This group is made up of four Jesuits: the Secretary General, Fr. Gabriel Codina, SJ, a Spanish Jesuit who serves as Fr. General's right hand man; the Postulator General, Fr. Paolo Molinari, SJ, an Italian Jesuit responsible for preparing causes for sainthood; the Procurator General, Fr. Robert J. Geisinger, SJ, a Chicago Province Jesuit serving as the Society's chief canon lawyer; and the General Treasurer, Fr. Gerardo Aste, SJ, a Peruvian Jesuit who oversees the finances of the international Society. These four officials advise Fr. General on liturgical, canonical, financial, and spiritual matters that impact the Society and its members.

The Sectoral Secretaries are the second group assisting Fr. General in the governance of the Society. These secretaries serve the Society by overseeing different "sectors" of Jesuit ministries, such as education, Ignatian spirituality, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the social apostolate, communications, interreligious dialogue, and ecumenism. The director of the Apostleship of Prayer, the World Secretary for Christian Life Communities, and the Director of the Society's Press and Information Office also report directly to Fr. General.

Twelve General Counselors make up the third group of Jesuits who help govern the Society. The general counselors function much like a presidential cabinet. Their role is primarily advisory, but they do, when required by Canon Law, become a deliberative voting body. The General Counselors are made up of 10 regional assistants and two additional members.

The regional assistants serve as liaisons between the Curia and regions of the world called "Assistancies." Worldwide, there are 10 Assistancies: Africa, East Asia, South Asia, Central Europe, East Europe, South Europe, West Europe, Latin America North, Latin America South, and the United States (the regional assistant for the United States is Fr. Frank E. Case, SJ, a member of the Oregon Province). The 10 Assistancies are made up of smaller apostolic units called Provinces. In the United States, there are 10 Provinces. Throughout the world, there are more than 90 Provinces, and nearly 20 regions, smaller units that don't yet constitute Provinces.

Each Province or region is governed by a superior (in the Provinces, those men are called Provincials). The Pro-

vincial of the Chicago Province is Fr. Edward W. Schmidt, SJ. He, like superiors around the world, governs the Province just as Ignatius governed the early Society, by maintaining regular contact with every member, assuring they are cared for, and ensuring that the Province's apostolic undertakings are furthering the mission of the wider Society. Fr. Schmidt meets annually with each member in the Province and has the power to assign them to new ministries. Fr. Schmidt and the rest of the superiors are appointed to 6-year non-renewable terms and have staffs of advisors and assistants not unlike the General's Curia. Individual Jesuit communities have superiors, too, and they are also a part of the governmental structure Ignatius created. Those superiors govern individual Jesuit communities and report to their Provincial. The Provincials report directly to Fr. General in Rome.

Ignatius began creating Provinces when it became clear to him that he, alone, couldn't effectively govern the Society. By creating Provinces, the responsibility of local government was switched to local leaders. But Ignatius designed the Society so that the superior general would still be the "head" of the body. He felt this was absolutely critical to sustaining and uniting such an international organization.

As a result, Provinces around the world remain very much connected to Fr. General (with the help of their regional assistant); he appoints each and every Provincial throughout the world and must approve each Jesuit assigned to be superior of a Jesuit community. Provinces must also ask approval from Fr. General for any major apostolic undertaking. Fr. General must approve each Jesuit before he can be ordained or take his final vows. And, on a wider scale, he articulates apostolic preferences or priorities for the worldwide Society.

Every time a Provincial visits one of the communities in the Province, he writes a letter to Fr. General detailing the state of the community and the condition of the Jesuits there. Each Provincial also sends

an annual letter to Fr. General, updating him on advances the Province has made and challenges it has encountered, just as the first Jesuits did. These letters are archived in Rome, just as letters from the first Jesuits were, but much of the correspondence today goes by e-mail. Fr. General also travels to each Province at least once during the Provincial's six-year term, something many of his predecessors were never able to do.

The regional assistants play a critical role in helping Fr. General maintain contact with the Provinces and Provincials. The regional assistants are always appointed from



When Ignatius was elected the first superior general of the Society, he had only his companions to govern. Today Fr. General must govern more than 20,000 Jesuits.



Ignatius often celebrated Mass in this chapel, which is adjacent to the office from which he governed the Society. These rooms were recently restored and are now open to the public.

the geographical area they represent. They understand the people and cultures. They help Fr. General understand the political, social, and economic situations in local regions so the Society can respond accordingly. When letters and e-mails arrive each day, requesting assistance with projects or permission to undertake new projects, Fr. General passes them on to the proper regional assistants, unless they are marked “soli” (Latin for “for your eyes only”). The regional assistants then research the issues or the project and make a recommendation to Fr. General. He makes the decision, based on how the ministry in question fits into the Society’s mission, both locally and globally. In both theory and practice, Fr. General is aware of every Jesuit ministry taking place around the world.

At the beginning of his *Constitutions*, Ignatius explained that “constitutions should be written to aid us to proceed better...along the path of divine service on which we have entered.” Since he wrote that, the Society of Jesus has grown to become the largest Catholic religious order in the world. By all accounts, it is also one of the most cohesive. It is, as Ignatius hoped it would be, a global organization acting locally in villages, towns, cities, and refugee camps throughout the world.

Much of the Society’s success can be attributed directly to St. Ignatius and his desire to maintain among his far flung “companions of Jesus” a “union of minds and hearts.” A lot of the credit, however, is also due to the many Jesuits who follow in the footsteps of Ignatius by serving as administrators. Their work provides a structure for the Society of Jesus, a structure that allows the spirit to move through the Jesuits and their many ministries from head to members and back again. ■



Jack O’Callaghan, SJ (right), served for 12 years as an advisor to Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, in Rome. In the background is St. Ignatius’s chapel.

Chicago Province Contributions

From to 1995, **Fr. John J. “Jack” O’Callaghan, SJ**, served in Rome as a General Assistant to Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ. As one of four elected assistants (roles that no longer exist), Fr. O’Callaghan met daily with Fr. General to advise him on all matters concerning the Society of Jesus. The General Assistants were his closest advisors, called on regularly to advise on issues that demanded their knowledge and understanding of social and political situations throughout the world. Today, two Jesuits from the Chicago Province serve in the Jesuit Curia. **Fr. Robert J. Geisinger, SJ**, is the Society’s Procurator General or chief canon lawyer. **Fr. Henry T. Chamberlain, SJ**, who served for many years as assistant treasurer for the Society, now serves as treasurer of the Curia’s Jesuit community. Also serving in Rome are **Fr. John J. Kilgallen, SJ**, professor of New Testament exegesis at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and **Fr. Paul V. Mankowski, SJ**, professor of Old Testament languages at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.