

Decree 1

Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18)*

1. The Society of Jesus has always sought to know and to follow God’s will for us. This Congregation takes up that task again. We do so from the heart of the Church, but gazing upon the world “that has been groaning in labor pains until now.”¹ On the one hand, we see the vibrancy of youth, yearning to better their lives. We see people enjoying the beauty of creation. We see the many ways in which people use their gifts for the sake of others. And yet, our world faces so many needs today, so many challenges. We have images in our minds of people humiliated, struck by violence, excluded from society, and on the margins. The earth bears the weight of the damage human beings have wrought. Hope itself seems threatened; in place of hope, we find fear and anger.

2. Pope Francis reminds us that “we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”² This one crisis that underlies both the social and environmental crises arises from the way in which human beings use – and abuse – the peoples and goods of the earth. This crisis has deep spiritual roots; it saps the hope and joy that God proclaims and offers through the Gospel, affecting even the Church and the Society of Jesus.

3. Yet, looking at reality with the eyes of faith, with a vision trained by the *Contemplatio*,³ we know that God labors in the world. We recognize the signs of God’s work, of the great ministry of reconciliation God has begun in Christ, fulfilled in the Kingdom of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. GC 35 recognized this mission.⁴ The letter of Father General Adolfo Nicolás on reconciliation⁵ and the teaching of Pope Francis⁶ have given this vision greater depth, placing faith, justice, and solidarity with the poor and the excluded as central elements of the mission of reconciliation. Rather than ask what we should do, we seek to understand how God invites us – and so many people of good will – to share in that great work. Alone, we find ourselves humbled and weak, sinners. With the Psalmist, we cry out, “Show us, O Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation.”⁷ But we experience joy in knowing ourselves as sinners who, in God’s mercy, are called to be companions of Jesus and “co-workers with God.”⁸

¹ Romans 8:22

² *Laudato si’*, 139

³ *The Contemplation to Attain Love, Spiritual Exercises*, 236

⁴ Cf. GC 35, D. 3, “Challenges to our Mission Today.” In doing so, GC 35 built upon the message of GC 32, D. 4, n. 2. “The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement. For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another.”

⁵ Father Adolfo Nicolás, “Reply to *Ex Officio* Letters 2014”, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* Vol. XXV (2014): 1032-1038.

⁶ Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 226-230, 239-258 and *Misericordiae Vultus*.

⁷ Ps. 85: 8

⁸ 1 Cor. 3:9

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4. We are not the first to seek clarity concerning God's call. The meeting of the First Companions in Venice⁹ is a powerful image, an important step in the formation of the Society. There, the companions confronted the frustration of their plans to go to the Holy Land. This drove them to a deeper discernment of the Lord's call. Where was the Spirit drawing them? As they discerned new direction for their lives, they held fast to what they had already found to be life-giving: sharing their lives together as friends in the Lord; living very close to the lives of the poor; and preaching the Gospel with joy.

5. They were priests, both learned and poor. For the First Companions, life and mission, rooted in a discerning community, were profoundly inter-related. We Jesuits today are called to live in the same way, as priests, brothers, and those in formation who all share the same mission. As we reflect and pray on each of these elements, we do so knowing the intimate unity of mission, life, and discerning community, all afire with the love of Christ.

6. This Congregation finds consolation and joy in returning to these roots, this integral vision of who we are, as well as in the knowledge that there are many others who, like us, hear the call to labor with Christ. We return to those roots now, first to a discerning community, then to our life in faith, and finally to the mission that flows from both. The poverty of life and proximity to the poor of the First Companions in Venice must mark our lives too,¹⁰ that poverty that engenders creativity and protects us from what limits our availability to respond to God's call. Such poverty of life constantly calls us to reflect on how we can live more simply with less. We pray too to enter ever more fully into that great mystical tradition that our First Fathers bequeathed to us, ever a grace, ever a challenge. Finally, we insistently ask for the grace to know how we can share in the great ministry of reconciliation, knowing that as Pope Francis reminds us, our response remains always incomplete.¹¹

A discerning community with open horizons

7. During their time in Venice, the companions were not always together; they were dispersed in order to fulfill many tasks. Nevertheless, it was at that time that they shared the experience of constituting a single group, united in following Christ, in the midst of the diversity of their activities. We Jesuits today are also engaged in a great variety of apostolates, which often demand specialization and a great deal of energy. If, however, we forget that we are one body, bound together in and with Christ,¹² we lose our identity as Jesuits and our ability to bear witness to the Gospel. It is our union with one another in Christ that testifies to the Good News more powerfully than our competences and abilities.

8. Thus, each of us should constantly desire that our own apostolic work develop, be stimulated, and helped to bear fruit, through the encouragement of our brothers. We always receive our mission from God in the Church, through our Major Superiors and local Superiors, in the practice of Jesuit obedience, which includes our personal discernment.¹³ If, however, our mission is not supported by the body of the Society, it risks withering. In our individualistic and competitive age, we should remember that the community plays a very special role since it is a privileged place of apostolic discernment.

⁹ *Autobiography* 93-95

¹⁰ *CN*, 143, 159-160. Our poverty is for us *madre* (*Constitutions*, 287) and *muro* (*Constitutions*, 553).

¹¹ Interview with Pope Francis, *Civiltà Cattolica* 2013 III: 449-477.

¹² *Constitutions*, 813

¹³ GC 35, D. 4

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9. The Jesuit community is a concrete space in which we live as friends in the Lord. This life together is always at the service of mission, but because these fraternal bonds proclaim the Gospel, it is itself a mission.¹⁴

10. In our Jesuit community life, we should leave room for encounter and sharing. This disposition helps the community become a space of truth, joy, creativity, pardon, and of seeking the will of God. Thus, community can become a place of discernment.

11. Communal discernment requires that each of us develop some basic characteristics and attitudes: availability, mobility, humility, freedom, the ability to accompany others, patience, and a willingness to listen respectfully so that we may speak the truth to each other.

12. An essential tool that can animate apostolic communal discernment is spiritual conversation. Spiritual conversation involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our faith, hope and love. Spiritual conversation creates an atmosphere of trust and welcome for ourselves and others. We ought not to deprive ourselves of such conversation in the community and in all other occasions for decision-making in the Society.

13. In our world that knows too much division, we ask God to help our communities become “homes” for the Reign of God. We hear the call to overcome what can separate us from one another. Simplicity of life and openness of heart foster such mutual concern. Moreover, living together as friends in the Lord nurtures the vocations of our men in formation and can inspire men to enter the Society.

14. Of course, this disposition to attend to the Spirit in our relationships must include those with whom we work. Often they teach us this openness to the Spirit. Important discernments concerning mission are often enriched by their voices and their commitment.

15. It is critical to emphasize the continuing relevance of the real closeness of the First Companions to the poor. The poor challenge us to return constantly to what is essential to the Gospel, to what really gives life, and to recognize that which merely burdens us. As Pope Francis reminds us: we are called to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.¹⁵ Such an attitude runs counter to the usual way of the world, in which, as Qoheleth says, “the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.”¹⁶ With the poor, we can learn what hope and courage mean.

16. In our communities and apostolates, we hear the call to rediscover hospitality to strangers, to the young, to the poor, and to those who are persecuted. Christ himself teaches us this hospitality.

Men on fire with passion for the Gospel

17. Our First Fathers entered into such a rich discernment of God’s call together because they had experienced the grace of Christ that set them free. Pope Francis urges us to pray insistently for this consolation that Christ desires to give.¹⁷ Reconciliation with God is first and foremost a call to a profound conversion, for each Jesuit, and for all of us.

¹⁴ CG 35 D. 2, 19, and D. 3, 41 and Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “On Community Life,” nn. 2 and 10, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, Vol. XXII (1998): 279-280, 288. Cf. *CN*, 314-330

¹⁵ See *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 198.

¹⁶ Ecclesiastes 9:16.

¹⁷ Address of Pope Francis to GC 36, 24 October 2016.

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18. The question that confronts the Society today is why the Exercises do not change us as deeply as we would hope. What elements in our lives, works, or lifestyles hinder our ability to let God's gracious mercy transform us? This Congregation is deeply convinced that God is calling the entire Society to a profound spiritual renewal. Ignatius reminds us that each Jesuit must "take care, as long as he lives, first of all to keep before his eyes God."¹⁸ Thus, all the means that unite us directly with God should be more than ever prized and practiced: the *Spiritual Exercises*, daily prayer, the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, spiritual direction, and the Examen.¹⁹ We need to appropriate ever more fully the gift of the *Exercises* that we share with so many, especially the Ignatian family²⁰, and the *Constitutions* that animate our Society. In a world losing its sense of God, we should seek to be more deeply united with Christ in the mysteries of his life. Through the *Exercises*, we acquire the style of Jesus, his feelings, his choices.

19. At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is the transforming encounter with the mercy of God in Christ that moves us to a generous personal response. The experience of the merciful gaze of God on our weakness and sinfulness humbles us and fills us with gratitude, helping us to become compassionate ministers to all.²¹ Filled with the fire of Christ's mercy, we can enflame those we meet. This foundational experience of God's mercy has always been the source of the apostolic audacity that has marked the Society and which we must preserve.

20. "Mercy," Pope Francis reminds us, "is not an abstraction but a lifestyle consisting in concrete gestures rather than mere words."²² For us Jesuits, compassion is action, an action discerned together. Yet we know 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.²³

On mission with Christ the Reconciler

21. In preparation for the 36th General Congregation, Father General Adolfo Nicolás invited the Society to enter into a process of seeking to hear "the call of the Eternal King, and to discern the three most important calls that the Lord makes to the whole Society today."²⁴ Our Provinces and Regions, through the Province and Regional Congregations, responded to this invitation. The call to share God's work of reconciliation in our broken world emerged often and powerfully. What GC 35 had identified as three dimensions of this ministry of reconciliation,²⁵ namely, reconciliation with God, with one another, and with creation, assumed a new urgency. This reconciliation is always a work of justice, a justice discerned and enacted in local communities and contexts. The Cross of Christ and our sharing in it are also at the center of God's work of reconciliation. This mission can lead to conflict and death, as we have witnessed in the lives of many of our brothers. While we speak of three forms of reconciliation, all three are, in reality, one work of God, interconnected and inseparable.

¹⁸ *Formula of the Institute* (1550), 1.

¹⁹ *Constitutions*, 813.

²⁰ GC 35, D 6, n. 29.

²¹ Address of Pope Francis to GC 36, 24 October 2016.

²² Address of Pope Francis to GC 36, 24 October 2016.

²³ Cf. Matthew 25: 31-46.

²⁴ Father Adolfo Nicolás, "Letter Convoking General Congregation 36," *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, Volume XXV (2014): 1096.

²⁵ GC 35, D. 3

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1st Call – Reconciliation with God

22. Reconciliation with God roots us in gratitude and opens us to joy, if we allow it. Pope Francis writes, “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. ... With Christ, joy is constantly born anew.”²⁶ Announcing and sharing the Gospel continues to be the reason for the Society’s existence and mission: that Jesus Christ be known, that he be loved in return, and that Christ’s love be a source of life for all. He always remains the source of the joy and hope we offer to others. Thus, the Society must respond more decisively to the Church’s call for a new evangelization, giving special emphasis to ministry to and with the young and with families.

23. A special gift Jesuits and the Ignatian family have to offer to the Church and her mission of evangelization is Ignatian spirituality, which facilitates the experience of God and can therefore greatly help the process of personal and communal conversion. Pope Francis constantly affirms that discernment should play a special role, in the family, among youth, in vocation promotion, and in the formation of clergy.²⁷ Christian life is more and more personalized through discernment.

24. Proclaiming the Gospel takes place in many different contexts: a) Secularization is a major challenge for many cultures, calling for creativity particularly in attracting and initiating younger generations into the Christian faith. b) In an increasingly pluralistic world, inter-religious dialogue in all its forms remains a necessity, one that is not always easy and that risks misunderstanding. c) In many parts of the world, the Society is called to respond to the challenge of believers abandoning the Church in the search for personal meaning and spirituality. d) Jesuits must continue to give importance to theological and scriptural studies by which we help people deepen their understanding of the Gospel in their diverse cultural contexts, with their hopes and their challenges. These studies should involve accompanying people from the depth of their spiritual traditions.

2nd Call – Reconciliation within humanity

25. Throughout our preparation for this Congregation as a universal body with a universal mission,²⁸ we heard accounts of the shocking forms of suffering and injustice that millions of our brothers and sisters endure. Reflecting on these, we hear Christ summon us anew to a ministry of justice and peace, serving the poor and the excluded and helping build peace. Among these various forms of suffering, three have appeared with consistency from many of our Provinces and Regions:

a) [26.] The displacement of peoples (refugees, migrants, and internally displaced peoples): In the face of attitudes hostile to these displaced persons, our faith invites the Society to promote everywhere a more generous culture of hospitality. The Congregation recognizes the necessity of promoting the international articulation of our service to migrants and refugees, finding ways of collaboration with JRS.

b) [27.] The injustices and inequalities experienced by marginalized peoples: Along with an enormous growth of wealth and power in the world comes an enormous and continuing growth of inequality. The present dominant models of development leave millions of people, especially the young and the vulnerable, without opportunities for integration into society. Indigenous peoples and communities, like the Dalits and tribals in South Asia, represent a paradigmatic case of these groups. In many parts of the world, women especially experience

²⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1

²⁷ *Amoris Laetitia*, 296-306.

²⁸ GC 35, D. 2, n. 20.

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such injustice. We are called to support these communities in their struggles, recognizing that we have much to learn from their values and their courage. The defense and promotion of human rights and integral ecology is an ethical horizon that we share with many other people of good will, who are also seeking to respond to this call.

c) [28.] Fundamentalism, intolerance, and ethnic-religious-political conflicts as a source of violence: In many societies, there is an increased level of conflict and polarization, which often gives rise to violence that is all the more appalling because it is motivated and justified by distorted religious convictions. In such situations, Jesuits, along with all who seek the common good, are called to contribute from their religious-spiritual traditions towards the building of peace, on local and global levels.

3rd Call – Reconciliation with creation

29. Pope Francis has emphasized the fundamental connection between the environmental crisis and the social crisis in which we live today.²⁹ Poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization are linked with environmental degradation. These are not separate crises but one crisis that is a symptom of something much deeper: the flawed way societies and economies are organized. The current economic system with its predatory orientation discards natural resources as well as people.³⁰ For this reason, Pope Francis insists that the only adequate solution must be a radical one. The direction of development must be altered if it is to be sustainable. We Jesuits are called to help heal a broken world,³¹ promoting a new way of producing and consuming, which puts God's creation at the center.

30. The multifaceted challenge of caring for our common home calls for a multifaceted response from the Society. We begin by changing our personal and community lifestyles, adopting behavior coherent with our desire for reconciliation with creation. We must accompany and remain close to the most vulnerable. Our theologians, philosophers, and other intellectuals and experts should contribute to the rigorous analysis of the roots of and solutions to the crisis. Jesuit commitment in regions like the Amazon and the Congo Basin, environmental reserves that are essential for the future of humanity, should be supported. We should manage our financial investments responsibly. And we cannot forget to celebrate creation, to give thanks for “so much good we have received.”³²

Toward the Renewal of Our Apostolic Life

31. All our ministries should seek to build bridges, to foster peace.³³ To do this, we must enter into a deeper understanding of the mystery of evil in the world and the transforming power of the merciful gaze of God who labors to create of humanity one reconciled, peaceful family. With Christ, we are called to closeness with all of crucified humanity. With the poor, we can contribute to creating one human family through the struggle for justice. Those who have all the necessities of life and live far from poverty also need the message of hope and reconciliation, which frees them from fear of migrants and refugees, the excluded and those who are different, and that opens them to hospitality and to making peace with enemies.

32. The Congregation calls the entire Society to a renewal of our apostolic life founded on hope. We need more than ever to bring a message of hope, born of consolation from our

²⁹ *Laudato si'*, 139.

³⁰ “Justice in the Global Economy: Building Sustainable and Inclusive Communities,” *Promotio Iustitiae* 121.

³¹ “Healing a Broken World,” *Promotio Iustitiae* 106.

³² *Spiritual Exercises*, 233.

³³ *Formula of the Institute* (1550) 1: “He should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged.”

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encounter with the Risen Lord. This renewal focused on hope includes all our diverse apostolates.

33. We do not want to propose a simplistic or superficial hope. Rather, our contribution, as Father Adolfo Nicolás always insisted, should be characterized by depth: a depth of interiority and “a depth of reflection that allows us to understand reality more deeply and thus to serve more effectively.”³⁴ To this end, Jesuits in formation should receive solid intellectual preparation and be helped to grow in personal integration.

34. Our educational apostolates at all levels, and our centers for communication and social research, should help form men and women committed to reconciliation and able to confront obstacles to reconciliation and propose solutions. The intellectual apostolate should be strengthened to help in the transformation of our cultures and societies.

35. Because of the magnitude and interconnectedness of the challenges we face, it is important to support and encourage the growing collaboration among Jesuits and Jesuit apostolates through networks. International and intersectoral networks are an opportunity to strengthen our identity, as we share our capacities and local engagements in order together to serve a universal mission.

36. Collaboration with others is the only way the Society of Jesus can fulfil the mission entrusted to her. This partnership in mission includes those with whom we share Christian faith, those who belong to different religions, and women and men of good will, who, like us, desire to collaborate with Christ’s reconciling work. In the words of Father General Arturo Sosa, Jesuits are “called to the mission of Jesus Christ, that does not belong to us exclusively, but that we share with so many men and women consecrated to the service of others.”³⁵

37. In all we do, we want to heed Pope Francis, who has urged us to promote dynamics of personal and social transformation. “What we need is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society.”³⁶ Prayerful discernment ought to be our habitual way of drawing closer to reality when we want to transform it.

38. Aware of the urgency of the present moment and of the need to involve all the Society and its apostolates in responding to these calls, this Congregation asks Father General, working closely with the Conferences and Provinces, to develop clear goals and guidelines for our apostolic life today.

Conclusion

39. From Venice, Ignatius and his companions journeyed to Rome, there to give shape to the one apostolic body of the Society, and to launch an extraordinary missionary activity. They did so under the Roman Pontiff, who confirmed their charism. This Congregation has experienced a similar grace of confirmation, encouragement and mission from Pope Francis. The Holy Father emphasized that we should not be satisfied with the *status quo* of our ministries. He called us again to the *magis*, “that *plus*” which led “Ignatius to begin processes, to follow them through, and to evaluate their real impact on the lives of persons.”³⁷

40. In faith, we know that, amidst the difficulties and challenges of our time, God never ceases to labor for the salvation of all people, indeed of all creation. We believe that God

³⁴ Father Adolfo Nicolás, “Letter on Intellectual Formation”, *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu*, Vol. XXV (2014): 926.

³⁵ Homily of Father General Arturo Sosa, 15 October 2016

³⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 223.

³⁷ Address of Pope Francis to GC 36, 24 October 2016. Cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 223: “Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces.”

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continues his work of “reconciling the world to himself in Christ.”³⁸ We hear the urgent summons to join the Lord in caring for the neediest and to extend God’s mercy to where injustice, suffering or despair seem to thwart the divine plan. We pray for the courage and the freedom “to dare the audacity of the ‘improbable,’” as we respond to God’s call “with the humility of those who know that, in this service where the human engages all his energy, ‘everything depends on God.’”³⁹ “Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!”⁴⁰

(Original: English)

³⁸ 2 Cor 5:19

³⁹ Homily of Rev. Bruno Cadoré, O.P. at the opening of GC 36.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor 6:2