



## National and International Trends in Apostolic Planning Design in Provinces of the Society of Jesus

With the publication of the final documents from General Congregation 36 on January 6, 2017, Arturo Sosa, SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, called each of the 68 Jesuit Provinces around the world to enter a process of Apostolic Planning. With the founding of the new USA East Province scheduled for 2020, our Province-wide apostolic planning will begin this later this year. We are one of the first Provinces in the world to begin this work after the publication of the Universal Apostolic Preferences on February 19, 2019.



This is an opportune moment for the Society of Jesus because it unites the Society of Jesus to the Catholic Church as it begins its Synod on Synodality. The Synod on Synodality is a two-year process of listening and dialogue that began with a solemn opening in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021. Each individual diocese and church celebrated the following week on October 17. The synodal process will conclude in 2023. VRev. Joseph O’Keefe, SJ has requested and be granted access by the

Ordinaries in two dioceses to conduct a review of reports submitted by parishes. This review will take place over the summer. And a report will be made available on the website in late July.

In the Synod, Pope Francis has invited the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through its experience which processes can help Her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open itself to mission.

In the Society of Jesus, approximately 30 Apostolic Plans have been completed, submitted to Fr. Sosa, reviewed, and given final approval. On the Jesuit website, one observes that of the 30 formally approved Apostolic Plans, 6 are from Provinces that include countries ranked in the “Top 50” on the Human Development Index of the United Nations. 24 are from Provinces that include less developed countries.

In North America, the Midwest and Central Southern Provinces and the Province of Canada have formally approved Apostolic Plans. As part of our research effort, we have had significant Zoom calls with Canada and we have visited the Midwest and Central Southern Provinces, where we engaged its leadership, reviewed all the key documents, and received a thorough description of their processes and timelines.

Most of the Plans include the classic elements of a strategic plan: strategic priorities, goals and tactics or actions. But the fact that an apostolic planning process will lead us to this familiar, and perhaps, more comfortable territory, differences abound. Many of those differences reflect the depth of the questions that were asked. Here is an example.

In several instances, a Province simply asked each of its sponsored institutions to figure out how they were going to implement the Universal Apostolic Preferences. Each institution sent back the single spreadsheet that was sent to them. These were compiled and submitted with all the appropriate prologues. This does not appear to be the purpose of an Apostolic Planning discernment. In our Statement of Purpose, we capture as succinctly as possible what we are going to do.

In other cases, the Apostolic Plan was not an Apostolic Plan at all, but they were rather a statement of values and orientations to be used in future decision-making. But those plans did not articulate clear direction or decisions. We found this to be of great concern. While we were inspired by some of the Apostolic Plans, other caused a kind of unease. The latter wound up becoming “cautionary tales”. The USA East Province has been most edified by the Apostolic Plan from Australia, our Central Southern Province, and the Provinces of the Philippines and Mediterranean Europe (Albania, Romania, Malta and Italy). The latter is especially impressive because it is a multi-country Province.

We observe in all the plan documents a tacit negotiation of holding historic tensions together. As the concluding paragraph of General Congregation 36 remarks, “The Society of Jesus has prospered in part because it has been able by the grace of God to hold tensions together: contemplation and action, faith and justice, charism and institutions, community and mission. We are pilgrims. Our path involves facing the creative tensions brought about by the diversity of persons and ministries in the Society. In seeking to progress in following the Lord, the Society must constantly re-imagine and discern how our governance structures can better serve the mission entrusted to us.”

At the same time, we are encouraged to acknowledge our biases, “loosen our grip” on our ideas and our institutions and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, re-imagine our shared apostolic future.

In 1540, Pope Paul III approved the outline of the Society of Jesus proposed by St. Ignatius and his companions. We should recall that the Pope, did not approve a specific blueprint for the Society, but rather he confirmed the Jesuit charism as expressed in the Formula of the Institute.