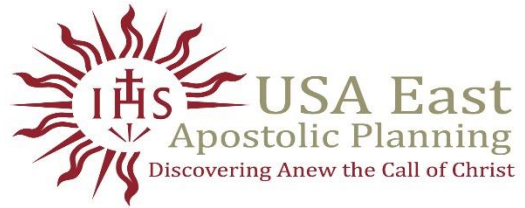


The Formula of the Institute



Six years before the founding of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius and his first companions went to the hill of Montmartre in Paris and pronounced vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. As the only priest among them, Peter Faber celebrated the Mass.

After several years of pastoral work among the people in Rome, “St. Ignatius received a remarkable grace while praying at the chapel of La Storta, just outside Rome, in October 1537, together with Peter Faber and Diego Laínez. He was, as he declares, ‘very specially visited by the Lord,’ whom he saw carrying his cross on his shoulder in the presence of his Father, who said to Ignatius, ‘I want you to serve us.’

From that moment forth, St. Ignatius never doubted that the Father had placed him with the Son; he insisted adamantly that the new congregation ought to be called the Society of Jesus.” Avery Dulles. “What Distinguishes the Jesuits?,” *America*, January 5, 2007. ([Complete article](#))



First vows of the First Companions at Montmartre on the Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 1534
Konrad Baumeister 1881

The writing of the Formula of the Institute was mandatory for any new Religious Order. In it, the founder of a Religious Order should define what characterized its way of life, distinguishing it from other already existing Religious Orders. The Formula of the Institute is a document that states what is most distinguishable in the way of religious life of the Society and is the first document to describe characterize the “way of life” of the Society that would differentiate it from other religious congregations.

We should note that the Formula of the Institute is the fruit of apostolic discernment of the First Companions. It would not be an exaggeration that the Society of Jesus itself is the fruit of communal apostolic discernment. In this sense, the Holy See approved the Charism of the Society of Jesus.

The following text is the “Formula of the Institute” composed by St. Ignatius and his first companions in 1539 as a kind of charter or mission statement for the new Society of Jesus. It was inserted with minor revisions into the 1540 bull, *Regimini militantis Ecclesiae*, in which Pope Paul III formally approved the foundation of the Society of Jesus.

“Whoever wishes to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and his vicar on earth, should keep in mind that once he has made a solemn vow of perpetual chastity he is a member of a community founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine and for the propagation of the faith by the ministry of the word, by spiritual exercises and works of charity, and specifically by the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity. He should further take care to keep always before his eyes first God, and the nature of this Institute which is his pathway to God; and let him strive with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God—each one, however, according to the grace which the Holy Spirit has given to him and according to the particular grade of his own vocation, lest anyone should perhaps show zeal, but a zeal which is not according to knowledge.

“The selection of each one’s grade as well as the entire distribution of employments shall be in the power of the superior or prelate who is to be elected by us, so that the proper order necessary in every well-organized community may be preserved. This superior, with the advice of his associates, shall possess in the council, where the majority of votes always has the right to prevail, the authority to establish constitutions leading to the achievement of this end which we have set for ourselves. In matters that are more serious and lasting, the council should be understood to be the greater part of the whole Society which can conveniently be summoned by the superior; but in matters less important and more temporary it will be all those who happen to be present in the place where our superior will reside. All right to execute and command, however, will be in the power of the superior.

“All the members should know not only when they make their first profession but daily, as long as they live, that this entire Society and each one individually are campaigning for God under [the pope] and the other Roman Pontiffs who will succeed him. And although the Gospel teaches us, we know from orthodox faith, and we firmly profess that all the faithful in Christ are subject to the Roman Pontiff as to their head and the vicar of Jesus Christ, still, for the greater humility of our Society and the perfect mortification of each one of us and the abnegation of our own wills, we have judged that it is of the greatest profit to us to go beyond the ordinary obligations and bind ourselves by a special vow, so that whatever the present Roman Pontiff and others to come will wish to command us with regard to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith, or wherever he may be pleased to send us to any regions whatsoever, we will obey at once, without subterfuge or excuse, as far as in us lies. We pledge to do this whether he sends us among the Turks or to other infidels, even to the land they call India, or to any heretics or schismatics, or to any of the faithful.

“Therefore, those who will come to us should, before they take this burden upon their shoulders, ponder long and seriously, as the Lord has counseled, whether they possess among their resources enough spiritual capital to complete this tower; that is, whether the Holy Spirit who moves them is offering them so much grace that with his aid they have hope of bearing the weight of this vocation. Then, after they have enlisted through the inspiration of the Lord in this militia of Christ, they ought to be prompt in carrying out this obligation which is so great, being clad for battle day and night.

“However, to forestall among us any ambition for such missions or provinces, or any refusal of them, let each one promise never to carry on negotiations with the Roman pontiff about such missions directly or indirectly, but to leave all this care to God and to his vicar and to the superior of the Society. This superior, too, just like the rest, shall also promise not to approach the pontiff in one way or another about being sent on some mission, except with the advice of the Society.

“All should likewise vow that in all matters that concern the observance of this Rule they will obey the superior of the Society. The superior, however, should issue the commands which he knows to be opportune for achieving the end set before him by God and by the Society. In his superiority he should be ever mindful of the kindness, meekness, and charity of Christ and of the pattern set by Peter and Paul, a norm which both he and the council should keep constantly in view. Particularly let them hold in esteem the instruction of children and the unlettered in the Christian doctrine of the Ten Commandments and other similar elementary principles, whatever will seem suitable to them in accordance with the circumstances of persons, places, and times. For it is very necessary that the superior and the council watch this ministry with diligent attention, since the edifice of faith cannot arise among our fellowmen without a foundation, and also since in our own members there is danger that as one becomes more learned he may tend to decline this occupation, less prestigious at first-glance, although no other is in fact more fruitful either for the edification of the neighbor or for the exercise by our own members of activities that combine both humility and charity. Assuredly, too, both because of the great value of good order and for the sake of the constant practice of humility (never sufficiently praised), the subjects should always be obliged to obey the superior in all matters pertaining to the Society’s Institute, and to recognize and properly venerate Christ as present in him.

“From experience we have learned that a life removed as far as possible from all contagion of avarice and as like as possible to evangelical poverty is more gratifying, more undefiled, and more suitable for the edification of our neighbors. We likewise know that our Lord Jesus Christ will supply to his servants who are seeking only the kingdom of God what is necessary for food and clothing. Therefore, one and all should vow perpetual poverty, declaring that they cannot, either individually or in common, acquire any civil right to any stable goods or to any annually recurring produce or fixed income for the sustenance or use of the Society. Rather, let them be content with only the use of necessary things, when the owners permit it, and to receive money and the sale price of things given them that they may buy what is necessary for themselves.

“They may, however, set up a college or colleges in universities capable of having fixed revenues, annuities, or possessions which are to be applied to the uses and needs of students. The general or the Society retains the full government or superintendency over the aforementioned colleges and students; and this pertains to the choice of the rectors or governors and of the scholastics; the admission, dismissal, reception, and exclusion of the same; the enactment of statutes; the arrangement, instruction, edification, and correction of the scholastics; the manner of supplying them with food, clothing, and all the other necessary materials; and every other kind of government, control, and care. All this should be managed in such a way that neither may the students be able to abuse the aforementioned goods, nor may the professed Society be able to convert them to its own

uses, but may use them to provide for the needs of the scholastics. At length, after their progress in spirit and learning has become manifest and after sufficient testing, they can be admitted into our Society. All those who are in holy orders, even though they can acquire no right to benefices and fixed revenues, should nonetheless be obliged to recite the office according to the rite of the Church.

“These are the matters which we have been able to explain about our profession in a kind of sketch, which we are now doing that by this written document we may give succinct information, both to those who are asking us about our Rule of Life and also to those who will later on follow us if, God willing, we shall ever have imitators along this path. By experience we have learned that the path has many and great difficulties connected with it, so we have considered it appropriate to prescribe that no one should be received into this Society who has not been carefully tested and shown himself prudent in Christ and noteworthy for either his learning or the purity of his Christian life. Only in this case should he be admitted into the militia of Jesus Christ. May Christ deign to be favorable to these our tender beginnings, to the glory of God the Father, to whom alone be glory and honor forever.

Amen.”
