The Jesuit Brother: A Statement by the National Jesuit Brothers' Committee to American Jesuits

The following table indicates that the decline in vocations to the Jesuit Brotherhood is a problem that affects the whole Society of Jesus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Scholastics</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th># of all Novices</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969-72</td>
<td>3298</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>3779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-76</td>
<td>2929</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>3184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-80</td>
<td>3510</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-84</td>
<td>3754</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>3966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since it is clear that this decrease in the number of Novice Brothers has implications for the Society's future, the 33rd General Congregation recommended that the situation be studied at all levels and that all possible steps be taken to promote Brothers' vocations (GC 38:18).

Since the attitude toward Brothers on the part of Jesuits themselves is a related factor and one that may be contributing to the decline in Brothers' vocations, the 33rd General Congregation also called for a change in our attitudes "so that our behavior toward one another in the Society is not ruled by human standards prevailing outside, but by the example of Christ who came not to be served, but to serve (GC 38:19)."

The radical vocation of all Jesuits is to apostolic service. This is foundational to all Jesuit programs. The ministries of the Society involve both ordained and lay religious. Consequently, we can talk about our shared or corporate apostolic vocation, with two specifications of how that vocation can be fulfilled, i.e., as a cleric or lay religious.

Establishing the priority of apostolic service as foundational to all Jesuit programs and this approach in recruitment, formation, apostolic placement, etc., will be the most authentic and effective way to bring about that conversion of attitude which will encourage Jesuit Brother vocations, and sustain those who are Brothers.

Many Jesuits look forward to the day when candidates will themselves take the initiative and begin to ask whether they are called to the priesthood or brotherhood. Our present image of the brother as simply aoadjutor to the "real Society" (i.e., professed Fathers) will not attract many such men. Although that image is traditional and may be hard to change, it sets up a two-class Society. The American man of today is not going to be attracted to the life of a Jesuit Brother if that commitment is perceived as second-class. We must convince all Jesuits to foster vocations to the entire Society of Jesus, underlining our unity as companions of Jesus.

A proposal/presentation for a study of the vocation, identity and mission of the Jesuit Brothers in the American Assistanicy was submitted to the Jesuit Conference in January 1984 by Brother Rick Curry, Chairman of the National Jesuit Brothers' Committee (NJBC). Brother Curry was asked to report to Father General and the Jesuit Conference Board in two years with a document that the delegates and alternate delegates could agree upon. The NJBC hopes that a clarification of the Jesuit Brothers' vocation from within the Society will lead to more successful promotion of this vocation outside the Society.

After proposal of the study in 1984, sub-committees were formed and the NJBC set about its task of formulating a statement that would treat the questions of recruitment, formation, and mission of the Jesuit Brother of the American Assistanicy today. The following document is the result of these committees' work.

Method

In preparation for its June 1985 meeting, NJBC in June of 1984 assigned various delegates and alternate delegates to contact by mail other Jesuits who were not members of NJBC to ask for their advice and insights. It was believed that those Jesuits could be of help in analyzing questions of definition, candidacy, novitiate, education, apostolate, tertianship, and continuing education of the Jesuit Brother. It was also decided that consulting these Jesuits by mail would make it possible to acquire their input without taking up too much of their time.

The executive committee found the results of this inquiry to be positive. The replies were reviewed at the NJBC meeting in June 1985 and were revised, word by word, by the Committee's delegates and alternates. A rough draft was prepared by the Chairman and sent out for another review by the members of NJBC.

Identity

The Brother identifies himself as called by God to the one Jesuit vocation shared by all members of the Society. The Brother fulfills this Jesuit calling by exercising various ministries in the Society of Jesus, according to the grace of the Holy Spirit and the measure of the spiritual and human gifts he has received from the Lord. In this way the brother is in fact a valuable bridge for the Church as both lay person and religious.

In order that the American Jesuit Brother's vocation develop within the total context of our common Jesuit calling, we recommend that a Jesuit Brother resource person be included at all stages of formation, from candidacy to tertianship where this is possible. Our Brothers should be thought of as vital to all aspects of the Society's apostolic life and be more fully included in the planning and administration of the Society's apostolic work.

Recruitment

We must actively and enthusiastically recruit vocations to our Brothers and include these men in the whole range of our Jesuit apostolic life. The Jesuit Brother must be thought of as vital to the charism of the Society of Jesus locally, nationally and internationally. When a candidate approaches the vocation director, he should be presented first with this shared or corporate apostolic vocation of all Jesuits. The choice of this apostolic vocation is the primary area of discernment. As the primary vocational discernment, this em-
emphasis influences all the stages of Jesuit formation, apostolic placement, continuing education, etc. Once this priority is established then there can be developmental discernment about whether a man could best fulfill that vocation as a priest or a brother.

Today, our brothers themselves are sometimes deficient in this understanding of the Jesuit vocation. Steps should be taken to make sure that the brother's vocation is better understood, appreciated and encouraged by all Jesuits. This should be addressed both on the local and province level.

Suggestions on recruitment include: advertisements in national and Catholic news media explaining the brothers' vocation; consultation with brothers who have recently taken vows in order to discover new emphases to be made in presenting the brother's vocation; announcement of some new ministries that have been opened up in the Church for laity and are therefore available to all the brothers, and preparation of a recruiting leaflet that would be included in any publicity sent to all candidates to the Society.

Candidacy to the Jesuit Brotherhood

NJBC believes that in a candidate to the Jesuit Brotherhood we should be looking for a mature person or at least one who is growing in maturity and is open to challenge. We expect the brother candidate to be a man who is healthy, generous, and has the potentiality for prayerfulness and spiritual growth. He should also be sociable, sensitive to the needs of others and have the ability to share feelings. He should have a strong sacramental life and the beginnings of a good understanding of the Church and the brothers' role in it. The candidate should also be questioned about his attitude toward the poor and the oppressed.

So far as education is concerned, we recommend that the candidate have a high school diploma and be willing to go on to further studies if in prayerful discernment studies are a way to be a better apostle. He should be positively disposed to take advantage of opportunities provided by the Society for his further growth and development in order to serve the Church. Furthermore, the student brother should receive competent training in his professional life and be as prepared in his field as his lay counterpart.

We further suggest that brothers be regular examiners/interviewers of all candidates to the Society. Since it is within the one Jesuit vocation that we are called to be either priest or brother, the spiritual director of a Jesuit candidate could be either priest or brother.

Formation / Education

- two year novitiate
- professional/academic training (preferably with Jesuit peers)
- two or three year regency
- at least one year of theological/pastoral enrichment (preferably with Jesuit peers)
- assignment after theology limited to a specified number of years
- tertianship

We recommend that the brother be evaluated at the end of each stage of his formation.

Novitiate

Since GC 33 has stated that brothers are an integral part of the Society of Jesus it follows that brothers should be an integral part of our novitiate communities both as novices and as staff members. The brothers should not have a separate novitiate nor have a separate program apart from the scholastic novices. Some men may prefer to enter the novitiate program as "indifferent" and that option should be allowed and made clear by the vocation director.

Once in the novitiate program, the novice brother is a regular member of the community, identifying himself first as a Jesuit among Jesuits. It would help on many different levels if a senior brother were on the novitiate staff. If this is not possible a novice brother should have a senior brother mentor assigned to him by the novice director. The novice brother and mentor should meet once a month to talk about incorporation into the Society of Jesus. Novice brothers might also benefit from the opportunity of meeting nationally with other novice brothers.

The novitiate should prepare the novice brother to contribute to the work of the Society of Jesus in the world and the Church today. No matter where his talents lie, the novice brother should see himself as part of an apostolic group that is meeting contemporary needs. If the recommendations of GC 33: 39-42 are to be implemented, the brother must share fraternally in our common apostolic vocation.

Post-Novitiate Formation

The Jesuit brother should be given competent training in Spiritual Theology, as well as a thorough understanding of the Jesuit Religious life, and a profound understanding of the Church and his place within it. Moreover, the brother should not only be formally educated, but he should be given tools to continue his education as a life-long process.

As men of the Ignatian Exercises, our brothers should be encouraged to prepare themselves to be competent directors of the Spiritual Exercises.

It cannot be stressed enough that the goal and objective of all the student brother's training should be to become an apostle.

In order to help remove the anonymity of the brother's vocation, Jesuit brothers should be trained to share their faith with God's people in a public setting. This will increase the visibility of the vocation to the brotherhood and help recruitment.

NJBC wishes to stress that the brother's educational program should be rich and full—not just a pragmatic preparation for the job market. Every educational program should emphasize writing and other communication skills. A brother's life is a rich and diverse one and offers many more occupational possibilities than the life of a priest. This could be stressed in the recruitment process.

The last, but by no means least, of NJBC's recommendations for the training of the brother is that specific ongoing training in the creative use of leisure time be given them. This recommendation was considered a must by all the brothers.
Regency and Assignments

With regard to the brother's regency, all that is said in paragraph 32 of the *Regional Order Of Studies For The American Assumption* regarding the Regency period should be adopted and adapted with the brother regent particularly in mind.

According to the nature and purposes of the apostolate to which a man is assigned during this time, the brother should be encouraged to join professional organizations that help him to contribute to the apostolate more effectively.

The brother's first assignments should be primarily apostolic and religious. This service should be seen not merely as work but as putting skills, training, and formation at the disposal of God's people. We integrate our lives as Jesuits by effectively becoming men for others. The brother should be seen in his work as a man who is able to contribute to the contemporary Church and to contemporary culture. He should also be encouraged to take on highly visible occupations that will lead others to an awareness of the brother's vocation.

Tertiarianship

The Tertiarianship should be seen as an important opportunity for the Society to share knowledge of their common vocation with our priests and brothers. If the Tertiarianship sponsors experiments, the brother should be expected to participate in them. The brother should also be encouraged to undertake ventures that are new to him.

The period between tertianship and final vows is a time in which key aspects of the Jesuit brother's vocation are further developed. These include deeper understanding of the vows, “Our Mission Today” (GC 33) and our common Jesuit vocation. There should be a deepening of knowledge of oneself, of openness to God, and of openness to the needs of our time. The brother should increase his understanding of prayer, community, sexuality, mid-life transition and how to handle it. Suggestion: it might also help if there were a “brother component” in each Tertiarianship program, or at least a class devoted to this topic, especially when tertianship enrolls no brother.

Continuing Education

In our times of rapid change and evolution, when new questions and new knowledge, both in theology and in other branches of learning, are constantly developing, a truly contemporary apostolate demands of us a process of permanent and continuing formation. Formation is, therefore, never ended. Our “first” formation must be seen as the beginning of this continuous process. (GN, #26) The brother must acquire the attitude and skills that will encourage him throughout his years of active ministry to regularly update himself. All Jesuits, if they are to continue to do competent ministry over a long period of years, require adequate opportunity for further study and for serious reflection on their apostolic service. It is specifically recommended that after about ten years after the completion of tertianship, all Jesuits who have had experience in active ministry should devote themselves for a time to intensive spiritual and doctrinal renewal.

Religious professionalism is also mandated for the brother. The brother should experience other cultures and way of life either through workshops or real life experiences in other countries. The *Spiritual Exercises* and pilgrimage to the Holy Land, as well as places of pilgrimage following St. Ignatius, are experiences some of our brothers have found extraordinary in their lives.

Professional or occupational updating is also necessary if we are to continue to serve the Church and the Society well. There are a variety of ongoing institutes and workshops that can sharpen the brother’s skills in the fields of social ministry, peace and justice, communications, prison work, street ministry, and education. Sabbaticals are also strongly recommended for brothers so that they may take a year off to pursue another occupation, learn a new skill, finish a degree program, or audit an academic program. (NJBC feels, however, that sabbaticals can be very threatening and anxiety-filled for a brother and cautions superiors and fellow Jesuits to deal gently but encouragingly in this area.)

The third and final suggestion is for a program of theological update which a brother can follow in one of our theological centers either by taking courses for credit or auditing them. There are additional programs on theological renewal within dioceses, along with the Brothers’ Program at Notre Dame, and the internships at some of our Spiritual Renewal Centers.

Conclusion

NJBC wants the tone of this document to be positive and optimistic, without avoiding or oversimplifying the nature of the problem. The Committee members, along with many other Jesuits, are alarmed at the decreasing number of our brothers and the lack of new recruits. They believe that the Lord’s call to serve as a brother in the Society is as sacred as it ever was. NJBC does not believe that the brothers’ vocation is obsolete or that the brothers are relics of a former era. Rather, they believe that a call to the Society as a brother is an awesome invitation and one that should be fostered with all the resources that the Society has at its disposal.

NJBC sadly concurs with GC 33 that there must be a conversion in attitude from within the Society. This conversion must be forthcoming soon or a vital part of the charism of the Society might be lost. Further, NJBC believes that Provincials, Superiors, Vocation Promoters, Novice Directors, other brothers and brother priests and scholastics can make a difference in the way they think and act and pray about our brothers.

It is NJBC’s hope that this document might begin that conversion process. Much will have to be done; but first a beginning must be made. If the dissemination of this document can begin that renewal from within the Society, then NJBC has accomplished what it set out to do in the shaping of it.