The Jesuits: One Mission, Many Ministries
What have I done for Christ?
What am I doing for Christ?
What will I do for Christ?

— St. Ignatius of Loyola

For more than 450 years Jesuit priests and brothers have lived an amazing story of serving the Church in new and unexpected ways. (Clockwise from top left) In the long Jesuit tradition of education, Fr. Antonio Martinez, SJ, serves as president of Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory in Houston, TX. Fr. Timothy Manatt, SJ, reads from the Gospel at Mass. Br. Guy Consolmagno, SJ, serves as an astronomer at the Vatican Observatory. Jesuit scholastic Stephen Wolfe, SJ serves Christ on international mission.
Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam – For the Greater Glory of God

“Go, set the world on fire!”

With words like these, Ignatius Loyola sent his good friend, Francis Xavier, on a mission to the Far East over four hundred years ago. These same words reverberate around the globe today. Since the founding of the Society of Jesus, thousands of men have been inspired to “set the earth on fire” (Luke 12:49) as companions of Christ on mission.

With the birth of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in the 16th century, a new fire ignited in a changing world. A novel form of religious life came to light, not just through human enterprise but also divine initiative. The spark of grace continues to burn in Jesuits today, as “a fire that kindles other fires.” From this initial flame, Jesuits dare to set all hearts on fire with the love of God.

Jesuit priests and brothers are “men for others,” and men on the move. United by a love of God, as companions with Jesus Christ in the mission of the Church, these men find new ways to spread the Gospel message, to defend and proclaim the faith of the Church, and to promote the justice of God’s kingdom to all nations and cultures.

The words of Pope Benedict XVI inspire us to forge new and difficult ministries for the sake of the Gospel:

“The Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching. The words of Pope Paul VI remain engraved on your hearts: ‘Whenever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme fields, at the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there has been and there is confrontation between the burning exigencies of man and the perennial message of the Gospel, here also there have been, and there are, Jesuits.’” (Pope Benedict XVI to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus – 21 February 2008)

“The Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust...”

Our order was founded in 1540 by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman.

18,000 Jesuits serve worldwide: 13,200 priests, 1,800 brothers and 3,000 scholastics (Jesuits in training for the priesthood).

Jesuits serve in more than 100 nations, with approximately 360 US and Canadian Jesuits serving abroad.
Jesuits Today: Responding to the Call of Christ the King

Founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola, and commonly called the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus is a religious order of priests and brothers in the Catholic Church. Serving in 112 nations on six continents, Jesuits number about 18,000 priests, brothers, and seminarians worldwide. Jesuits are motivated by a deep, personal love of Jesus Christ and a “desire to imitate in some manner our Creator and Lord Jesus Christ... since he is the way which leads to life” (St. Ignatius of Loyola).

Jesuits seek to be “contemplatives in action” combining the service of faith with the promotion of justice, following the example of their founder, Ignatius, who strove to “find God in all things.” Jesuits consider themselves to be sent on mission with Jesus as companions consecrated for service under the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Jesuits are best known in the fields of education (schools, colleges, universities, seminaries, theological faculties), intellectual research, and spiritual renewal. In the United States, the Society of Jesus sponsors 28 colleges and universities, over 50 high schools and middle schools, many retreat centers, parishes, and other ministries. Jesuits work in a wide variety of roles including teacher, actor, doctor, poet, lawyer, social worker, administrator, professor, pastor, scientist, or film editor. Jesuits also engage in missionary work and direct evangelization to the poor, social justice, interreligious dialogue, and other such “frontier” ministries.

Most importantly, Jesuits continue the tradition of providing Christian retreats based on the Spiritual Exercises – the foundational writing of Ignatius Loyola. “The Exercises are not only a program of prayer; they also embody a way of prayer. . . . the Spiritual Exercises are one of the main repositories for understanding the way of Ignatius: what leads to God, what elicits greater freedom, and what helps you live a purposeful life.” (Fr. James Martin, S.J., The Jesuit Guide to [Almost] Everything). The mission of the Jesuit is to be ever available for the more universal good, desiring always the “magis,” that which is truly better “for the greater glory of God” (Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam). It is this availability for the Church’s universal mission that marks the Society of Jesus as an apostolic religious order.

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Training for Mission

The various elements of Jesuit training emerge from the experiences and life of St. Ignatius. The average length of Jesuit formation is about 11 years, depending on one’s background and course of studies. Each stage is described here in brief:

Novitiate

The first stage of Jesuit formation is a two-year novitiate where the novice begins to live the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a community setting. He learns about the traditions, rules and expectations of the Society of Jesus. During this time he makes the Spiritual Exercises in a 30-day retreat and engages in a variety of “experiments,” such as serving the poor, visiting the elderly, caring for the sick, and teaching children. At the end of this two-year period of prayer, work and study, he pronounces perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience either as a brother or as a scholastic who will prepare for priestly ordination.

First Studies

Having pronounced three vows, a Jesuit normally begins a three-year period of philosophy and theology studies. If the man has not yet received a bachelor’s degree, he studies for that at this time. He may also be asked to use this time to begin graduate work in a field of specialization. In the United States, there are three programs of “first studies” where a man might be sent: Fordham University (New York City), Loyola University Chicago (Chicago), and St. Louis University (St. Louis).

Regency

During regency, the Jesuit works for two or three years in a Jesuit high school, college, or other approved ministry while he lives in a Jesuit community. He functions as a working member of the Society and continues his study of and incorporation into the Order.

Theology

For a new Jesuit who desires priestly ordination, he moves next to a stage of theology studies, lasting three years or so. In the United States, Jesuit “scholastics” study theology at The Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in California, or at The Boston College School of Theology and Ministry in Massachusetts. Theology studies and ordination may be followed either by full-time apostolic work or specialized studies.

For men who desire to serve as a Jesuit brother, the training will differ from that of the “scholastic” who pursues the track toward ordination. Since the brothers’ vocation is to serve as a Jesuit in areas of non-ordained ministry, he may engage in shorter theology studies. His philosophical and theological training, whether or not in a degree program, will likely be focused to contribute to his mission as a Jesuit brother.

Tertianship

After completing his theological studies and some years of ministry, the Jesuit priest or brother concludes his formal formation of prayer, guidance and studies in a stage of tertianship – a time of reaffirmation, spiritual renewal and ministry with the poor. After the tertianship period, the Jesuit is called to final vows in the Society of Jesus. He is fully incorporated into the Order.
Consecrated for Service

For Jesuits, the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience foster greater availability for the work of the Kingdom of God in the Church.

Poverty
The vow of poverty helps a Jesuit to live more simply. He renounces personal ownership of material possessions, seeks greater solidarity with the poor, and shares all goods in common in imitation of the early disciples of Jesus.

“Our poverty is apostolic because it witnesses to God as the one Lord of our lives and the only Absolute; it distances us from material goods and frees us from all attachment so that we can be fully available to serve the Gospel and dedicate ourselves to the most needy. In this way, poverty is itself a mission and a proclamation of the Beatitudes of the Kingdom.”

(GC 34, D 9, n. 4)

Chastity
By the vow of chastity, a Jesuit consecrates his life entirely to the Lord, promising to live his life in a state of celibate chastity for the Kingdom of God. By this vow, the Jesuit brother or priest becomes available to love and to serve all people, not attached to one person or to one family.

“This life of chastity consecrated to God offers a living witness that Christ can engage human beings in so comprehensive a love and a prophetic reminder that we were created finally for that future life with God in which the children of the resurrection will ‘neither marry nor give in marriage’ (Luke 20:34-36). In this way living unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven preaches the Gospel in deed rather than words…”

(GC 34, D 8, n. 8)

Obedience
The vow of obedience is the touchstone of Jesuit life. St. Ignatius wanted his companions to be ready at any time to respond to the greatest needs of the Church. Jesuits seek to follow the will of God as it is revealed in the mission given to each Jesuit by his religious Superior in the Society of Jesus. Solemnly professed Jesuits take a special fourth vow of obedience to the Holy Father in the matter of missions, undertaking to go wherever they are sent.

“Impelled by the love of Christ, we embrace obedience as a distinctive grace conferred by God on the Society through its founder, whereby we may be united the more surely and constantly with God’s salvific will, and at the same time be made one in Christ among ourselves…”

(GC 31, D 17, n. 2)

“The traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience foster greater availability for the work of the Kingdom of God in the Church”
The Union of Hearts and Minds

Jesuits live the vows and serve the Church in communities of prayer and service. They follow the call to be companions of Jesus, fellow workers in ministry, and truly brothers and friends in the Lord. Although sent on mission to the far reaches of the globe, separated by national boundaries and cultural differences, these men seek to be united in heart and mind by an ardent love of Christ, a desire to preach the Gospel, and an active role in service of the Church–bonded by the vows and common life. Jesuits normally live in communities in order to live more simply by sharing goods in common. Jesuits find support and friendship for apostolic life in communal prayer, daily Eucharist, and regular sharing of common life through conversation and recreation. It is in the context of community life with a shared sense of being companions on mission that the vows are able to be lived out by Jesuits, individually and collectively, with fidelity and integrity.

Is the Society of Jesus Right for You?

The Jesuits invite you to pray and reflect on what you have read about the Society of Jesus. Some helpful questions for your reflection might be:

- Where do your desires and passions lead you?
- What gifts do you possess that might be beneficial to God’s people?
- Are there any Gospel passages that motivate you to consider religious life?
- Who are your heroes in the service of the Gospel?
- How is God inviting you to share your gifts as part of Christ’s mission?
- Could you support the service of faith and the promotion of justice in the Church?
- Which aspects of Jesuit life excite you with possibility?
- When would be the best time to contact a Jesuit about your desires?

Here are some ways you can learn more about the Society of Jesus, Ignatian spirituality, and the Jesuit vocation:

- Speak with a Jesuit priest or brother in your area.
- Make contact with a vocation director for more information (see the back of this booklet).
- Make an Ignatian retreat at one of the many Jesuit retreat centers around the nation or ask a Jesuit Vocation Director or Promoter about discernment retreats being offered.
- Attend informal meetings publicized in province and alumni bulletins.
- Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and share your journey with a spiritual director.
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