



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

**« Care » (cura) in the governance of the life-mission
of the Society in this change of the eras**

2020/03

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Brothers,

In 2018 I asked to be informed in the *ex officio* letters how the inseparable and complementary dimensions of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* are being exercised in the life-mission of the Society. First of all, I would like to thank once again the Jesuits and our companions in mission for all the information they have given me through their replies¹.

We are faced with a topic that reflects a tension proper to the charism and way of proceeding of the Society of Jesus. It is one that takes on particular importance in this change of the eras and in the face of the challenges of the Universal Apostolic Preferences, cooperation, common discernment and apostolic planning. With this letter I aim to gather together the reflections made and to offer encouragement so that we may continue deepening these important dimensions of our life-mission.

After briefly reviewing the main elements that appear in the *ex officio* letters, I will present some others that I hope will help the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus to deepen its understanding of these two complementary dimensions so that we can continue on the path of discernment about them. The complexity of the topic, the abundance and quality of the information received and the search for the way forward require a rather long text that calls for quiet reading and gradual assimilation.

1. Good Practices

The information received through the *ex officio* letters highlights good practices that show the importance of unity between *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis*. This unity is an indispensable condition for integrating each person into the mission and ensuring his or her accompaniment. In this way, a greater union of minds is achieved, and various temptations are

¹ Of the 1,374 letters that I received 1,188 were from Jesuits and 186 from companions in mission. Many thanks!



avoided, such as taking individual ownership of a work, seeking to be always in charge, striving for personal power and isolating oneself from the mission received as a body.

Some of the good practices frequently mentioned are: the reaffirmation of apostolic co-responsibility, honest and open cooperation, facilitation of personal understanding among those who participate in the mission, and joint formation within each apostolic work and among different works in the same Zone, Region or Province...

The most important thing is quality communication, frequent and regular, formal and informal, between Superiors, Jesuit communities, Delegates, Secretaries and Directors of Work who increasingly are lay men, lay women, diocesan or religious priests and religious women. Such communication is needed in order to reaffirm and preserve the unity of objectives and direction² and to promote greater sharing in the apostolic dimension of the work. In those apostolic works where there are management boards or other collegial forms of governance, it is also important to find ways to foster communication between the Local Superior and their members without interfering in the internal arrangements of the work.

In many Provinces and Regions, meetings of all the Local Superiors and Directors of Work from a wide geographical area or from the whole Province / Region are a great help for gaining both a broader vision of the mission and insight into the apostolate of the members of the community. Clarity regarding the various responsibilities as well as shared experiences of formation help this relationship between Superior and Director to run more smoothly and to produce good fruit.

2. Some Difficulties

At the same time, there are some difficulties that need to be reflected upon and discerned. I list some of them.

The new structures of governance are in themselves an opportunity for greater integration between Major Superior / Local Superior/ Delegates / Territorial Coordinators and Directors of Work. But they are often complex. In some cases, the large territorial and /or demographic dimensions of the units of governance jeopardize the accompaniment of both *curae*, if adequate strategies to delegate responsibilities are not used to avoid multiplying levels of referral. An *ad hoc* commission evaluated the structures created in recent years and the results of this study were taken into consideration in my letter to the whole Society of January 3, 2019³.

The figure of the Local Superior, in the midst of this network of offices and functions, is in danger of being blurred and weakened. Issues of apostolic mission tend to be discussed directly with the sector or territorial Delegate / Responsible or with the Major Superior, without including the Local Superior. On the other hand, in multi-apostolic communities Local

² Cf. GC 32, D. 11

³ "On restructuring Provinces and Regions", 19/01



Superiors find it difficult to accompany apostolic concerns or institutions whose structure or areas of activity are unfamiliar to them or where the relationship with their governing bodies is difficult.

There are situations where Directors of Work enjoy excessive autonomy with respect to local and even provincial government. This is the consequence, in some cases, of their personal identification with the work under their responsibility, entailing a loss of freedom for apostolic spiritual discernment. These difficulties become even more acute in cases where there is a lack of clarity regarding the identity of a work, apostolate or institution in its relationship with the Society.

3. Main Challenges

In this perspective, the *ex officio* letters present a series of challenges and proposals, of which I highlight the following:

- To define precisely the different roles in apostolic governance, especially in the processes of creating new apostolic units (Provinces, Regions) or inter- and supra-provincial works and projects. It is equally important to consider the possible role of the Conferences of Major Superiors and their responsibility in projects of an inter- and supra-provincial nature.

- To carry out the directive of the 36th General Congregation to "review the implementation of the 'Guidelines for the Relationship between the Superior and the Director of Work' (1998). In this regard they should take into account the increasing number of lay Directors of Jesuit Works and adapt the *Guidelines* as needed for the realities of their Conferences"⁴. In both the "Guidelines for the Relationship between the Superior and the Director of Work" and the "Guidelines for Local Superiors" there are useful insights which, together with the good practices noted, show the path to follow in their revision, adaptation and implementation.

- To provide adequate personal accompaniment for all the Directors of Work, and for all those who have expressed their willingness to cooperate in the common mission. There is need for a well-planned offer of ongoing formation that includes the history, tradition and spirituality of the Society, discernment in common, apostolic planning, cooperation, leadership and management, and the relationship between the two *curae*.

- To grow in cooperation, because the vitality and apostolic mission of the least Society increases when we unite our potential with the efforts of many other people of good will. The challenge of cooperation is even greater when we work with people who do not share the Catholic or Christian faith. This motivates us to be creative in finding ways of integration that follow the founding principles of a Society whose purpose is to praise, reverence and serve God and neighbour and whose apostolic works have a clear identity based on the *raison d'être* of the Society.

- To face the new challenge of the *curae* in the apostolic governance of the networks, which extend beyond the frontiers of the Provinces and Conferences into a variety of territories,

⁴ GC 36. D.2,21



and to find a way to relate these networks to the governance of the Society. In the General Curia we are studying this situation with the aim of understanding its complexity better as well as its possibilities for strengthening cooperation, and starting from there, proposing strategies for the better use of its potential in conjunction with discernment and apostolic planning.

4. The experience of care in the life of Ignatius

The expressions *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis*, relatively recent in the tradition of the Society⁵, refer to an experience that runs through the entire life of St. Ignatius and which he refers to as "care". His entire existence is viewed from this perspective and is reflected in the *Autobiography*, in the *Exercises* and in the *Constitutions*.

The *Autobiography* is the account of the experience of being cared for that leads to caring for others. There Ignatius shows how he is led and cared for by God himself. The *Spiritual Exercises* are the mystical journey of God's care, committed to the vocation of the human being whom he cares for through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ. Everything is thus contemplated *ad amorem*. And the *Constitutions*, in their parts IV, VIII and IX are nothing other than the commitment of those who govern to preserve and care for the body of the Universal Society in accord with its mission.

To exercise oneself spiritually is to grow in the experience of a God who guides and cares for everyone and everything, and who teaches some that they should care for others and for the whole of creation. Here too, Master Ignatius teaches his sons of all times to remain committed to the full meaning of vocation: to care for people so that mission may serve the will of God, which is care for all that exists.

The 36th General Congregation reminds us of God's care for us: "*At the heart of Ignatian spirituality there is a transforming encounter with the Mercy of God in Christ that moves us to a generous personal response. (...) This foundational experience of God's mercy has always been the source of that apostolic daring which the Society has carried as its mark, and which it is our duty to preserve*"⁶.

This is the source of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* in the life of every Jesuit and every person who chooses to follow the Lord inspired by Ignatian spirituality. It is the source of the fruitfulness of our life-mission.

⁵ Although education in the Society of Jesus puts care of the person in the centre, according to Fr Gabriel Codina, S.J. the expression *cura personalis* appears (for the first time?) in the instruction of Fr Ledóchowski on universities and colleges in the Assistancy of the United States of America of 15 August 1934. It was revised by Fr Janssens (27 September 1948). Cf. G. CODINA, *La Ratio Studiorum* (1599), in: J.A. MESA, *La pedagogía ignaciana. Textos clásicos y contemporáneos sobre la educación de la Compañía de Jesús desde san Ignacio de Loyola hasta nuestros días*, Compañía de Jesús – U. P. Comillas – Sal Terrae – Mensajero, Roma-Madrid-Bilbao, 2019. Pp. 148-149.

⁶ GC 36, D. 1,19



5. The care of life-mission

The *ex officio* letters make it clear that **difficulties in the matter of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* derive mainly from separating the two**. When such a duality occurs, the course taken is to separate competences between the Local Superior and the Director of the Work which does not further the care of mission. Reducing the relationship between *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* to its juridical limits and trying to distribute responsibilities between the Superior and the Director of the Work destroy the necessary tension between them that makes possible the care of life-mission according to the Ignatian charism⁷.

However, Ignatius' experience shows that care, deeply rooted in his spiritual experience and his mystical journey, offers the true dimension of the unity *cura apostolica-cura personalis*, dimensions of **one single *cura***, that is, care for mission. This single *cura* has as its focus persons, communities and works, which are at the service of mission. It is mission, therefore, that must be the fundamental criterion that unites *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis*. Our mission includes and implies inseparably our way of living and relating to each other, of caring for people and communities. This care for our way of living and relating is also a mission in itself⁸.

When we consider this unity, we can affirm that the care of mission belongs to the whole body of the Society, even though this responsibility falls primarily within the competence of Major Superiors. However, Delegates, Local Superiors, members of the community, Directors of Work and other Jesuits together with their companions in mission in the works, should also assume the care of mission, according to their different levels of responsibility.

In the care of mission, the special nature of the different vocations of those who participate in it should be taken into account: lay men and women, Jesuits, non-believers, other religious men and women, diocesan priests, believers of various religions. The challenge for leaders is to create the right conditions so that all feel that they can fully develop their capacities according to their personal characteristics, their vocation and the level of responsibility they have in the apostolic work.

The intimate relationship between life and mission should not only be contemplated within the religious body of the Society and the vocation of each Jesuit, but also in the relationship with those persons who, not being Jesuits, also participate, according to their vocation, in the mission of the Society. The mission thus shared, and the growth in the participation of others, places the community-work relationship in the new and challenging perspective of cooperation.

⁷ Cf. GC 36, D. 2,27

⁸ Cf. GC 36, D. 1,9; GC 35, D. 2,19 and D. 3,41



6. Instruments for the care of mission-life

In this sense we can recall those excellent instruments for the care of mission in which all those involved in mission ought to participate: *spiritual conversation* and *discernment in common*. Spiritual conversation, to the extent that it becomes our habitual mode of exchange in communities and apostolic works, prepares us for discernment in common as the ordinary way of reaching decisions in the life-mission of the Society. Spiritual conversation presupposes attentive listening to oneself and to others. It is a listening to the Spirit who speaks to us in the experience of sharing, opening us to a new look at reality, the fruit of this sharing.

The 36th General Congregation stresses the importance of spiritual conversation⁹. This emphasis commits us, on the one hand, to offer good formation programmes in each Province / Region in order to benefit ever more from its use. On the other hand, it challenges us to create in our apostolic works methods for reaching decisions inspired by the characteristics of spiritual conversation and discernment in common. This way of making decisions constitutes one of the characteristics of the identity of the apostolic works under the responsibility of the Society of Jesus.

Spiritual conversation strengthens mutual trust and leads to a deeper knowledge of ourselves, of other people and of the context in which we live out our mission. It becomes, therefore, the preparation for discernment in common, as a process for "seeking and finding" the will of God.

In this connection, I would like to take up what I already said in my letter on discernment in common: "The conviction that God is acting in history and is constantly communicating with human beings is the assumption on which our efforts to discern in common are based. For this reason, we should seek out those conditions that allow us to hear the Holy Spirit and be guided by Him in our life-mission. The personal and group disposition to receive and follow the Spirit who communicates with us prevents a false type of discernment in common, which only seeks to clothe in correct Ignatian language decisions that were already made on the basis of the criteria of one's own group"¹⁰.

In all this, the account of conscience, our Jesuit tradition of openness, honesty and the desire to seek God's will together constitute the cornerstone. Without it, it is difficult to see ways forward; without it, we risk walking in darkness and desiring God's will but without employing the means required.

⁹ GC 36, D. 1,12

¹⁰ Carta sobre el discernimiento en común, 27 September 2017 (2017/11)



7. Moving forward with our reflection on *cura* in the apostolic body

In the *ex officio* letters, the examples of good practices presented together with the awareness of difficulties and challenges, confirm that we are not just starting out, but that we have come a long way. The discernment in common of the Universal Apostolic Preferences and their reception as basic orientations for our life-mission in the next ten years open up a new stage of our journey towards a better understanding and practice of the care of mission and people.

In order to care for mission, the Society of Jesus needs to care for the people who make it possible and form its apostolic body. Partnership and shared mission do not have their *raison d'être* in the fact that we Jesuits, in many places, are less numerous, nor are they a new way of serving ourselves. Their *raison d'être* is the realization that, by fostering conversation, consultation and discernment in common, we are building up the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus, following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Second Vatican Council. The role and responsibility of the laity in the life and mission of the Church is at the heart of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. To learn to work together with lay men and women, with the diocesan clergy and with other religious men and women is to work in the Society, caring and allowing oneself to be cared for, helping one another. Both Jesuits and non-Jesuits are responsible for each other's vocation, so that all vocations find their place and potential for development. How many vocations to the Society have been activated and accompanied by non-Jesuits in our works!

Care requires, in all, conversion and open-mindedness. It leads to "opening up processes", to continuous reflection on ourselves as a body involved in the *missio Dei*, in which we Jesuits cooperate with so many others in a new and pluralistic apostolic situation. Caring for one another frees us from the clericalism, paternalism, individualism and authoritarianism found in so many current contexts. To care and to be cared for is to grow in the universal Society and is an essential part of the culture of our apostolic body.

This new situation leads us to rethink the identity and role of the Jesuit in apostolic works, not only in those areas of the Society where the number of Jesuits and their presence in works is decreasing, but also in those areas where the presence of Jesuits in works is substantial. We are invited to examine how Jesuits understand themselves as partners in the *missio Dei*. We are invited to inspire new and creative ways of living as partners.

In any case, the Society, through the structures it considers most appropriate, has the responsibility of maintaining and strengthening the apostolic character of the institutions and projects it runs, learning how to find God in the substance of the institutions, because "my Father works always"¹¹.

¹¹ John 5, 7; cf. The "Contemplation for obtaining Love" of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius.



8. Living the tension between *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* fruitfully

Understanding *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* as being linked together, care for life-mission requires close cooperation between the Local Superior and the Director of the Work. Some good practices that have borne fruit and can inspire one another have been mentioned above. Everyone involved in the mission must be clearly aware of his or her responsibility in it. We should not expect to live the relationship without tension, since this is part of its nature. The goal is to live the tension in a healthy and constructive way. It is most important, therefore, to establish procedures and to provide room for frequent formal conversations between the Local Superior and the Director of the Work so as to foster care of the mission. Depending on *people, times and places*, formal exchanges will take the form that is most effective and may be complemented by other types of meeting or dialogue.

In this regard, the "Guidelines for the Relationship between the Superior and the Director of the Work", in numbers 23 to 31, continue to inspire and orient us. They show how the Local Superior can strengthen his confreres in their apostolic mission, taking care that their way of life makes them fit to fulfil it. To do this effectively, it is important that he visit them in their apostolic environment and talk with the Director of the Work about what they do there. In this way the Local Superior contributes to making the community truly apostolic. It is also recommended that, when the community is responsible for an apostolic work, it is up to the Local Superior to encourage the Jesuit members of the apostolic team and, cooperating with the Director, to foster the Ignatian and Jesuit identity of the institution. The character and manner of living out this cooperation can be still more clearly defined by the Major Superior, who may draw up *ad hoc* directives. The Local Superior is still responsible for supporting the Director of the Work's mission of apostolic animation.

Care, like cooperation, cannot be improvised. It requires personal conversion and self-awareness, but it also demands strengthening skills and formation procedures aimed at the exercise of shared leadership. In this way it is possible to help each other, to take care of each other, to place oneself alongside the other in a spirit of sharing. This formation is part of the mission of the Local Superior, who can arrange it with the Director of the Work.

9. Delegating and other forms of support for governance

In the care of mission, according to *our way of proceeding*, the annual visitations of the Major Superior to communities and works and the account of conscience given to him by the Jesuits under his responsibility are instruments of fundamental importance. The Major Superior, whose authority extends to the whole Province or Region, to all its members, communities and apostolic works, must ensure this care in order to serve better the administrative unit under his responsibility in all its community and apostolic complexity.

The process of restructuring the governance of the Society of Jesus has highlighted the role of "delegation" in the exercise of authority in the apostolic body. In fact, according to the *Constitutions* of the Society, the General Congregation delegates to the Superior General



authority for the care of the life-mission of the universal body. In turn, the Superior General delegates the required authority to the Major Superiors for the care of the unit for which they are responsible, and the Local Superiors and Directors of Work, with the authorization of Father General, receive from the Major Superior the appropriate delegated authority.

In administrative units that are large, both demographically and geographically, some other persons receive delegated authority to accompany different areas of life-mission and to ensure their care. In several large and geographically extensive Provinces, Delegates have been appointed to care for Jesuits of the third age or for those in formation or in a particular apostolic area. In others, authority has been delegated over a given territory. The effectiveness of these forms of delegation depends on establishing permanent contact between the Delegates and the Major Superior who always retains the authority he has received over the members of the Province or Region and its apostolic works.

Recent General Congregations have promoted processes of restructuring the Society that are generating new forms of support for apostolic governance that are different from and complementary to the delegation of authority. These new forms are intended to help in the coordination of apostolic areas, in the accompaniment of the development of the apostolic plan or in the organization of communities and works in a given geographical area. In accordance with our way of proceeding, these forms, as well as the delegations, are always subject to the examination and discernment of Father General who will be able to introduce the changes that will guarantee the best care for the mission and the life of the people involved.

10. Immediate steps

We are at the end of Lent, preparing to live the Easter experience in the special situation for humanity created by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss. In this sense I suggest some immediate steps that we can take and I invite all the members of the apostolic body of the Society to get started.

Every Jesuit can ask himself how he can improve his openness at all levels of his life. Ask yourself what can help you to grow in the openness and honesty that spring from the inner freedom and Ignatian indifference acquired in the experience of the "Principle and Foundation" of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

I ask Local Superiors and Directors of Work (Jesuits or lay) to take suitable initiatives to help communities and works to make spiritual conversation or similar forms of exchange the usual way of discussing matters concerning the life of the community or apostolic work.

Every Major Superior can ask himself how he may grow in his capacity to engage in in-depth dialogue with the members of his Province and with companions in mission who have responsibilities in it. In particular, every Major Superior should examine his way of receiving the account of conscience and put in place the means to make it a space for in-depth exchange



in the way conceived by St. Ignatius as an instrument for the care of the apostolic body and the life-mission of the Society.

It also carries the challenge of building a culture of in-depth dialogue with our companions in mission in such a way that, while maintaining the greatest respect for the conscience and vocation of each one, an atmosphere of discernment is generated that illuminates the apostolic planning of each work in the overall plan of each Province or Region in the light of the Universal Apostolic Preferences.

11. Final reflections

Care has been a fundamental dimension from the very moment of the Society's birth. The "Deliberation of the First Fathers" in 1539, points this out as an essential part of discernment: *"Should we take care of those who go there [Broët and Rodrigues, sent to Siena] and they of us, and recognize each other; or perhaps we should take care of them no more than of those outside the Society"*. And when they listen to the Spirit, they feel they must remain united, forming one body *"and taking care and having understanding of one another for the greater good of souls"*. Because the way of life they had already experienced gave them this opportunity *"to act in what concerns the salvation of souls, which is the only thing we seek after the care of ourselves"*.

The 36th General Congregation, inspired by this founding insight of the Society, affirms that *"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 (...) 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. The 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"*¹².

Living out *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* in their intimate relationship and in their tension is what guarantees care of mission. Discerning the way the mission is carried out is an imperative for the Society. We are not living through *"simply an era of change, but a change of era"*¹³, as the Holy Father recently said, and to show us the way, he confirmed the Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029.

The *ex officio* letters of 2018 have been a further step in the process of evaluating the current structures of governance of the Society at its various levels and in its various forms as requested by the last two General Congregations. This discernment is not yet complete. Much work remains to be done to put into practice the specific directives of the General Congregations and to respond creatively to the challenges of evangelization in the new era that is emerging.

¹² GC 36, D. 1, n. 8-9

¹³ Greeting of the Holy Father to the Roman Curia for the Christmas celebrations, 21 December 2019.



Let us put our trust in God and let us be guided by the Holy Spirit with the interior disposition of conversion and openness that is required for being truly available to follow the Spirit and let us put in place the means we have at our disposal to quicken the pace. May Our Lady Mother of the Society lead us by the hand.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Arturo Sosa', is positioned to the right of the text 'Fraternally,'.

Arturo Sosa, S.J.
Superior General

Rome, 25 March 2020
Solemnity of the Annunciation
(*Original : Spanish*)