Decree 21: “Interprovincial and Supraprovincial Cooperation,”
General Congregation 34 (1995)

“Today, more than ever,” the following decree from the 34th General Congregation states, “the needs of the world constitute an urgent call to put our Ignatian universalism into practice.” The decree recognizes that the “needs that call for common action are many; the difficult search for world unity requires the presence, witness, and involvement of the Society.” It continues to outline several recommendations to “deepen a worldwide spirit and strengthen formal structures and informal ties that will better enable global and regional cooperation.”

Our Vision

1. Ignatian heritage. The international character of our mission finds its genesis in the Trinitarian vision of Ignatius; its meaningful expression is found in our fourth vow of obedience to the Holy Father. Ignatius and his companions decided to form a single apostolic body to be placed at the disposal of the Vicar of Christ for universal mission. For Ignatius, the more universal was the service, the more was it divine. This has meant, throughout our history, that Jesuits are ready to go wherever in the world their service is most needed; availability is to be an attitude of the individual Jesuit and a characteristic of the whole Society: mobile, agile, responding to the needs of a fast-changing world.

2. The world and the Church today. Today, more than ever, the needs of the world constitute an urgent call to put our Ignatian universalism into practice. Growing consciousness of the world has given us a deeper realization that some problems are global in nature and therefore require global solutions: the division between rich and poor and the consequent need to seek an alternative socioeconomic world order, the struggle to overcome the international forces that tend to marginalize the entire continent of Africa, the need to rebuild entire societies after the collapse of totalitarian regimes, a better redistribution of the resources available for evangelization. The needs that call for common action are many; the difficult search for world unity requires the presence, witness, and involvement of the Society.

3. Living our heritage. Effective apostolic service also requires a lived awareness of the local church. We must promote inculturation in order to evangelize all peoples and all cultures. We must be apostolically rooted in a way that does not weaken the universal character of our call and service. We are to dedicate all our energies to the particular mission we have received, contributing to the dynamic life of the individual apostolic work, community, and province in which we serve, without losing our awareness of being sent into the Lord’s universal vineyard. Together we form unum corpus apostolicum. To live this tension between the local and the universal is not easy; our universal consciousness needs to be nourished, expressed, and challenged.
What Have We Achieved?

4. Recent general congregations have emphasized the universal dimension of our vocation and, in various ways, stressed the importance of international cooperation. Provincials have been reminded that in addition to their responsibility for their own provinces, they share responsibility with Father General for the needs of the whole Society. In response, many positive fruits have been produced. The awareness of being one universal body has grown. Ignatian universalism is being expressed in many distinct ways: mutual help and solidarity among different provinces and regions, sharing of information and experiences, interprovincial meetings and work groups, a variety of activities undertaken in common. In particular, conferences of major superiors have fostered better communication and attention to common problems; in some cases they have been able to establish common works.

5. However, we agree with Father General that “we do not exploit all the possibilities given to us by being an international apostolic body.” A certain kind of provincialism, the immediate demands of local needs, and a lack of appropriate interrelated structures have prevented us from realizing our global potential. If we are to respond to the calls of today’s world in fidelity to our universal vocation, we must move beyond current accomplishments. We must deepen a worldwide spirit and strengthen formal structures and informal ties that will better enable global and regional cooperation. In the spirit of this general congregation, a spirit of implementation, we offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations

6. Fostering an attitude of universalism. In response to the grace of our Jesuit vocation, we must foster an attitude of universalism not only in the admission and formation of new members but as an interior attitude of all Jesuits, particularly those having responsibility for governance.

7. Candidates: The universality of the Society is to be presented to candidates; evaluation of their suitability is to take into account their openness to and capacity for this characteristic of our vocation.

8. Formation: The universality of the Society as a characteristic of our Ignatian charism is to be emphasized at each stage of formation. The appropriation of this dimension of our charism can be reinforced by experiences of the universal Society such as international meetings of those in formation and opportunities to become familiar with another culture in another part of the world. As far as possible, Jesuits should receive a part of their formation in another culture.

9. Permanent formation: One objective of ongoing formation is to foster an attitude of universalism through experiences of the universal character of the Society: every Jesuit should have such opportunities. This will not only develop a personal sense of Ignatian universalism but also enable provinces to develop a more global perspective.
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10. **Facility in languages:** In order to facilitate communication with other cultures and throughout the universal Society, all are to learn languages other than their own, and the Society as a whole should try to have a common language. To that end, Jesuits in formation will learn English; those whose mother tongue is English will learn another modern language of global significance, to be determined by the cultural context in which they live. As far as possible, Jesuits who have completed initial formation are encouraged to follow the same principle.

11. **Being sent on mission to another culture:** The ideal of Jesuit universalism is that every Jesuit should be available for assignment anywhere in the world. In practice, since the transition from one culture to another may not be easy, screening and training procedures have to be established. In addition, we need to ensure that a man being sent to a different culture or on an international mission is psychologically mature enough to live what could be a less rooted style of life. To this end, some form of informationes should be used.

12. **Governance:** For the effective living-out of our universality, it is essential that those responsible for governance in the Society, particularly provincials along with their consultors, have a strong sense of this charism and “possess the qualities and endowments so absolutely necessary for the establishment of true and productive cooperation among themselves.... Father General should, moreover, have these qualities in mind when naming provincials” and their consultors. The meeting of new provincials with Father General is an appropriate time to emphasize their role in developing the universal character of the Society.

13. Developing global and regional networking. The official structure for the governance of the Society—Father General, his council, and major superiors throughout the world—constitutes a framework for the development of many different forms of global and regional cooperation and networking, with examples ranging from an interprovince novitiate to the Jesuit Refugee Service.

14. **Global networking:** Although numerous regional and international networks already exist, to exploit more fully the possibilities given us by being an international body, additional global and regional networks must be created. Such networks of persons and institutions should be capable of addressing global concerns through support, sharing of information, planning, and evaluation, or through implementation of projects that cannot easily be carried out within province structures. The potential exists for networks of specialists who differ in expertise and perspectives but who share a common concern, as well as for networks of university departments, research centers, scholarly journals, and regional advocacy groups. The potential also exists for cooperation in and through international agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other emerging associations of women and men of goodwill. Initiative and support for these various forms of networks should come from all levels of the Society, but the secretariats of the General Curia must continue to play an important role in establishing them.

In many respects, the future of international cooperation remains largely uncharted. With creative imagination, openness, and humility, we must be ready to cooperate with all those working for the integral development and liberation of people.
15. **Twinning:** Twinning, which has replaced the traditional concept of “mission regions,” has become an increasingly effective instrument for mutually enriching exchanges between provinces around the globe. A thorough review of twinning is recommended in order to redefine its goals and functions, so that greater solidarity and a more effective matching of resources with needs can be achieved. Mission offices are invited to participate in this review, so that they may broaden their function to include a concern for greater cooperation and effectiveness.

16. **Conferences of Major Superiors.** General Congregation 34 reaffirms the establishment of conferences of major superiors, recommended by GC 31 as a structural means for interprovincial and supraprovincial cooperation; it strongly urges Father General to promote the development of these conferences.

17. **Variety:** It is recognized that for a number of reasons significant differences exist in the degree to which conferences have developed in the different regions of the Society. Rather than seeking uniformity, the design and the mode of operating of the various conferences of major superiors will reflect cultural and regional differences.

18. **Objectives:** In spite of their differences, for the sake of a necessary consistency among conferences it is recommended that the objectives of each include the following:

   a. to open the Society of a given region to the universal dimensions of the Society
   
   b. to help major superiors become more aware of their responsibility for the Society and the Church throughout the entire region
   
   c. to facilitate unity, communication, a common vision, and effective leadership among major superiors
   
   d. to set priorities, to plan for and coordinate common activities

19. **Composition:** The composition of a conference is determined by Father General after consultation and taking into account geographical and cultural factors, in order to ensure that cooperation among the provinces involved will be meaningful and fruitful. It may be necessary to restructure some existing conferences so as to increase the number of common interests among the member provinces.

20. **Conditions for effectiveness:** As conferences become more structured, true and productive interprovince and supraprovince cooperation will require the effective leadership of a moderator, along with statutes approved by Father General.

21. Moderators of conferences of major superiors. The moderator is to assist in the development of a common vision for the region and for the whole Society, and guide efforts towards the setting of priorities, planning, and decision making. As the executive of the conference, he carries out decisions, implements policies, and oversees common undertakings such as common works, projects, and services. He also promotes various forms of cooperation among the Jesuits in the provinces of the conference and their apostolic works.
22. **Authority of the moderator:** The moderator of a conference must have the authority needed to call its major superiors to research, planning, and setting of priorities, and then to call them to carry out the required actions both within provinces and regionally. The major superiors themselves remain jointly responsible for the implementation of actions decided upon and for the provision of the resources needed for common works. The respective authority and responsibilities of the moderator and of the major superiors of the conference, along with procedures for making decisions, are to be specified in the statutes approved by Father General.

23. **Common works:** When a common work is under the care of a conference, any division at the level of major superior between apostolic responsibility for the work and *cura personalis* of the Jesuits assigned to it on a permanent basis should be avoided as much as possible, so as to safeguard the normal conditions necessary for authentic Ignatian government.

24. **Personnel for common works:** Established rules and objective criteria will govern the assignment of personnel from the provinces and regions. When a major superior is asked to make a particular man available for a common work, he should normally give this request a priority at least equal to the needs of his own province or region.

25. **Meetings of moderators:** Moderators will be called together annually by Father General (a) to heighten their own sense of the universal character of the Society, (b) to gain a better understanding of the global priorities of the Society, and (c) to work with Father General in overseeing and encouraging the further development of regional and global cooperation. Stability rather than rapid turnover of membership within the group of moderators will enable these meetings to have the desired continuity that will make them more effective.

26. **Communication:** Communication among moderators, especially when called for by further development of regional and global priorities, is to be encouraged. In addition, regular communication between the moderators and their respective regional assistant(s) will enable everyone involved to serve the Society more effectively. Regional assistants for the provinces involved will be invited to meetings of the conference.

27. **Attendance at meetings:** All moderators, including those who are not also provincials, attend general congregations and meetings of provincials *ex officio*.

28. **Priorities.** Father General, with his staff and in his regular direct contacts with provincials and with the moderators of the conferences, will discern the greater needs of the universal Church and will establish global and regional priorities. These priorities are to be taken into consideration as conferences and provinces establish their own respective priorities. Annual letters should evaluate apostolic effectiveness based on these priorities.

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