



Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019-2029

2019/06

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear friends in the Lord:

The Universal Apostolic Preferences, which I promulgate with this letter, are the fruit of an *election*. A choice has been made among several possibilities, all of them good. Our desire has been to find the best way to collaborate in the Lord's mission, the best way to serve the Church at this time, the best contribution we can make with what we are and have, seeking to do what is for the greater divine service and the more universal good.

At the end of the sixteen months that the process lasted at the various levels of the Society, I presented to the Holy Father four universal apostolic preferences:

- A. *To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment;*
- B. *To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice;*
- C. *To accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future;*
- D. *To collaborate in the care of our Common Home.*

In his confirmation letter of 6 February 2019, Pope Francis observed that “the process that the Society followed to arrive at universal apostolic preferences was (...) a real discernment.” He affirmed that the proposed preferences “are in agreement with the current priorities of the Church as expressed through the ordinary magisterium of the Pope, the Synods, and the Episcopal Conferences, especially since *Evangelii gaudium*.”

The Holy Father insisted that “the first preference is crucial because it presupposes as a basic condition the Jesuit’s relationship with the Lord in a personal and communal life of prayer and discernment.” And he added: “Without this prayerful attitude the other preferences will not bear fruit.”

I. Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019-2029

Thanks to the universal apostolic preferences formulated by Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, which have guided us for more than fifteen years, several processes have been initiated which must be continued. These include qualified presence in Africa and China, the responsibility of the whole Society for the interprovincial works in Rome entrusted to us by the Popes, the consistency of



our intellectual apostolate, and our service to refugees and migrants. During the next ten years, the following preferences will guide us in incarnating the mission of reconciliation and justice in all the apostolic services to which we, along with others, have been sent.

A. To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment

We sense that secular society today profoundly challenges the Church in its task of proclaiming the Gospel. As believers we feel an urgent need to overcome both new secularisms and the nostalgia for cultural expressions of the past. **We resolve to collaborate with the Church in experiencing secular society as a *sign of the times* that affords us the opportunity to renew our presence in the heart of human history.** A mature secularized society opens up spaces for the complex dimensions of human freedom, especially religious freedom. In a mature secular society, the conditions exist for the emergence of circumstances conducive to personal religious processes, independent of social or ethnic pressure, that allow people to ask profound questions and to choose freely to follow Jesus, to belong to an ecclesial community, and to adopt a Christian lifestyle in social, economic, cultural, and political spheres.

The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola are a privileged instrument for making the life and action of the Lord Jesus present in diverse social contexts of today's world. Therefore, **we resolve to gain a deeper experience of the Spiritual Exercises** so that they lead us to a personal and communal encounter with Christ that transforms us.¹

At the same time, **we resolve to offer the Spiritual Exercises in as many ways as possible**, providing many people, especially the young, the opportunity to make use of them to begin or to advance in following Christ. Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises and the spirituality derived from them is our preferred way of showing the pathway to God through commitment to the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ in history.

We also resolve to **promote discernment as a regular habit for those who choose to follow Christ.** The Society of Jesus is committed to practicing and spreading spiritual discernment, both personal and communal, as the ordinary way of making decisions guided by the Holy Spirit in our lives, our apostolic works, and our ecclesial communities. This is a choice to seek and find the will of God, always, letting ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. Through our discernment in common of the apostolic preferences, we have experienced a renewal in our way of proceeding. Therefore, **we resolve to make regular use of spiritual conversation and discernment** in our implementation of the preferences at all levels of the life-mission of the Society.²

We want to share with others the most fundamental discovery of our lives, namely, that discernment and the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius show the way to God. We need to follow the call to deepen our knowledge and experience of Ignatian spirituality, and we want to do so out of a living faith that is incarnate and consistent, a faith nourished by familiarity with God that is the fruit of a life of prayer, a faith that enters into dialogue with other religions and with all cultures. Our faith is manifested in works of justice and reconciliation because it comes from the Crucified and Risen One who leads us to the crucified of this world so that we might be bearers of hope in the new life that the Lord gives us. Ours is a faith lived in community that becomes a testimony to Hope.

¹ Cf. GC 36, d. 1,18.

² Cf. Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, 167 and 169.



B. To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice

Sent as *companions in a mission of reconciliation and justice*, we resolve to walk with individuals and communities that are vulnerable, excluded, marginalized, and humanly impoverished. We commit ourselves to walk with the victims of abuse of power, abuse of conscience, and sexual abuse; with the outcasts of this world; with all those whom the biblical tradition knows as the poor of the earth, to whose cry the Lord responds with his liberating incarnation.

The necessary condition for becoming companions “on the way” in the style of Jesus is, out of closeness with the poor, “to announce his Gospel of hope to the many poor who inhabit our world today.”³ To come closer to the poor means going out to the human peripheries and to the margins of society, adopting a style of life and work appropriate to the situation so that our accompaniment will be credible. To achieve this goal, we resolve, at all levels of the Society, to discern who are the most vulnerable and excluded persons in our midst and to find ways to walk closely beside them.⁴

The path we seek to follow with the poor is one that promotes social justice and the change of economic, political, and social structures that generate injustice; this path is a necessary dimension of the reconciliation of individuals, peoples, and their cultures with one another, with nature, and with God. Care for indigenous peoples, their cultures, and their basic rights occupies a special place in our commitment to reconciliation and justice in all their dimensions.

We confirm our commitment to care for migrants, displaced persons, refugees, and victims of wars and human trafficking. We also resolve to defend the culture and the dignified existence of indigenous peoples. Consequently, we will continue to help create conditions of hospitality, to accompany all these people in their process of integration into society, and to promote the defense of their rights.

We want to contribute to strengthening political democracy by imparting good civic formation, especially among those at the base of the social pyramid. By promoting social organizations committed to seeking the Common Good, we want to help counteract the pernicious consequences of the diverse forms of “neo-liberalism,” fundamentalism, and populism.

We commit ourselves to help eliminate abuses inside and outside the Church, seeking to ensure that victims are heard and properly helped, that justice is done, and that harm is healed. This commitment includes the adoption of clear policies for the prevention of abuse, the ongoing formation of those who are committed to mission, and serious efforts to identify the social origins of abuse. In this way, we effectively promote a culture that safeguards all vulnerable persons, especially minors.

³ GC 35, d. 2,13.

⁴ Cf. GC 36, d. 1,15.



We join many other people and institutions in promoting a culture of hospitality⁵ and of protecting the rights of children and others made vulnerable by changing social structures.⁶

Accompanying the impoverished requires us to improve our studies, our analysis, and our reflection in order to **understand in depth the economic, political, and social processes that generate such great injustice; we must also contribute to the elaboration of alternative models.** We commit ourselves to promoting a process of globalization that recognizes multiplicity of cultures as a human treasure, protects cultural diversity, and promotes intercultural exchange.

We accompany the poor, inspired by our faith in God the Father of mercy who invites us to embrace reconciliation as the foundation of a new humanity.

C. To accompany the young in the creation of a hope-filled future

The 2018 Synod recognized young people and their situation as a crucial place from which the Church seeks to perceive and discern the movement of the Holy Spirit through this moment of human history. The poor and the young are a complementary and interwoven *locus theologicus*. Young people, most of whom are poor, face enormous challenges in our world today, including reduced job opportunities, economic instability, increased political violence, multiple forms of discrimination, progressive degradation of the environment, and other ills, all of which make it difficult for them to find meaning in their lives and to draw closer to God.

Youth is the stage of human life when individuals make the fundamental decisions by which they insert themselves into society, seek to give meaning to their existence, and realize their dreams. By accompanying the young in this process, teaching them discernment and sharing with them the Good News of Jesus Christ, we can show them the way to God that passes through solidarity with human beings and the construction of a more just world.

Young people continue opening up to the future with the hope of building a life of dignity in a reconciled world that is in harmony with the environment. **It is the young who, from their perspective, can help us to understand better the epochal change that we are living and its hope-filled newness.** Today, young people are the principal protagonists of an anthropological transformation that is coming to be through the digital culture of our time, opening humanity to a new historical epoch. We are living through a period of change from which will emerge a new humanity and a new way of structuring human life in its personal and social dimensions. Young people are the bearers of this new form of human life that can find, in the experience of encounter with the Lord Jesus, light for the path toward justice, reconciliation, and peace.

The apostolic works of the Society of Jesus can make an important contribution to creating and maintaining spaces that are open to young people in society and the Church. Our works seek to be spaces open to youthful creativity, spaces that both foster an encounter with the God of life revealed by Jesus and deepen the Christian faith of the young. Such spaces should help young people discern the path by which they can achieve happiness by contributing to the well-being of all humankind.

⁵ Cf. GC 36, d. 1,16.

⁶ Cf. GC 36, Matters entrusted to Father General.



Young people experience the tension between the drive toward cultural homogeneity and the emergence of an intercultural human society that respects and is enriched by diversity. The logic of the market economy leads to homogeneity, but young people aspire instead to diversity that corresponds to the exercise of true freedom and opens up creative spaces that contribute to the emergence of a humane, intercultural society. With that as a base, they can commit themselves to building a culture of safeguarding that guarantees a healthy environment for children and young people, creating conditions that allow all to develop their full potential as human beings.

To accompany young people demands of us authenticity of life, spiritual depth, and openness to sharing the life-mission that gives meaning to who we are and what we do. Having these, we can learn, along with the young, to find God in all things, and through our ministries and apostolates, we can help them live this stage of their lives more profoundly. Accompanying young people puts us on the path of personal, communitarian, and institutional conversion.

D. To collaborate in the care of our Common Home

In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that all human beings share responsibility for care of creation, considered by many peoples “mother earth.” “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. (...) This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she ‘groans in travail’” (Rom 8:22).⁷

The damage done to the earth is also damage done to the most vulnerable, such as indigenous peoples, peasants forced to emigrate, and the inhabitants of urban peripheries. The environmental destruction being caused by the dominant economic system is inflicting intergenerational damage: not only does it affect those now living on earth, particularly the very young, but it also conditions and jeopardizes the life of future generations.

We resolve, considering who we are and the means that we have, **to collaborate with others in the construction of alternative models of life that are based on respect for creation and on a sustainable development capable of producing goods that, when justly distributed, ensure a decent life for all human beings on our planet.** The preservation over time of the conditions of life on our planet is a human responsibility of immense ethical and spiritual importance. Our collaboration should include both participating in efforts to analyze problems in depth and promoting reflection and discernment that will guide us in making decisions that help to heal the wounds already inflicted on the delicate ecological balance. We are especially concerned about areas that are so crucial for maintaining the natural equilibrium that makes life possible, such as the Amazon region; the river basins of the Congo, India, and Indonesia; and the great extensions of open sea. Caring for nature in this way is a form of genuinely worshipping the creative work of God. Bold decisions are required to avoid further damage and to bring about lifestyle changes that are necessary so that the goods of creation are used for the benefit of all. We want to be actively present in this process.

Laudato Si' reminds us that “disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers

⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 2.



and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us.”⁸ It is logical to conclude that what Christians “need is an ‘ecological conversion,’ whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue.”⁹

It is necessary, therefore, to step out of oneself and lovingly care for everything that is good for others. A model of human life reconciled with creation will not be possible if we are not able to break out of individualism and inaction.

Conversion for us, Jesuits and our companions in mission, begins by **changing the habits of life** promoted by an economic and cultural system based on the consumption of an irrational production of goods. The words of Pope Francis encourage us in this direction: "There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle.”¹⁰

II. Guided by the Spirit

The process we have gone through has its source in the winds of ecclesial renewal inspired by the Spirit in the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. That same Spirit, present and active today in the Church, has been at work also in General Congregations 31 to 36, leading the Society through a demanding process of spiritual and apostolic renewal. Inspired by the image of our first companions in Venice (1537), as they pondered where the Spirit was leading them,¹¹ the 36th General Congregation sent us forth as companions on a mission of reconciliation and justice.¹²

Inspired by the words of Pope Francis, GC 36 felt the need to return with greater confidence to our origins and to the practice of discernment in common. In sharing our experience during these months, we have come to realize the grace involved in the very process of discernment in common, lived at all levels of the body of the Society. For many, it has meant a rediscovery of some dimensions of Ignatian spirituality: it has helped us to renew the practice of spiritual conversation in order to seek together the way of Jesus; and it has been an exercise of discernment in common as a way of finding God's will in our life-mission. We have experienced the grace of feeling ourselves to be one united body and of growing in indifference and availability so as to become a discerning community with open horizons.¹³ With these apostolic preferences we commit to continue forward on the path that we have begun, taking up this fundamental dimension of our life and mission.

We have lived through a process that has produced, step by step, a consensus that we believe is guided by the Holy Spirit. We began it with many doubts and concerns, not knowing the path well and struggling to overcome skepticism. Like the first companions, we, too, come from diverse origins and cultures, and we have different ways of seeing and understanding things.

⁸ *Laudato Si'*, 208.

⁹ *Laudato Si'*, 217.

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, 211.

¹¹ Cf. *Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* [93-95].

¹² “This reconciliation is always a work of justice....The Cross of Christ and our sharing in it are also at the center of God’s work of reconciliation.” GC 36, d. 1, 21).

¹³ Cf. GC 36, d. 1, 7-16.



But we have found a unity of desire, a common passion to serve Jesus as He carries His cross to all the ends of the earth. Slowly we learned to believe and to trust. We could say that the Lord took us by the hand, like a school teacher, just as he led Ignatius in Manresa.¹⁴ The contributions from the communities, apostolic works, regions, provinces, and from Jesuits in formation provided a vital starting point.

The contributions of the six Conferences of Major Superiors were in surprising agreement. Like the first disciples, we rowed out into the deep and found ourselves in the midst of the storm, but we were amazed to experience how the Lord came to us. It is He, the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord, who shows us his wounds and invites us to join with him in the quest for justice. He impels us toward new frontiers, accompanying those whom society has discarded, announcing the Good News to one and all, so that they might be transformed by the love of our God. Our hardened hearts are also changing day by day, becoming filled with mercy and compassion.

This process has taught us that universal apostolic preferences are a means for continuing to be guided by the Spirit. Moreover, the preferences are an instrument for deepening the style of life-mission indicated by GC 36 when it invites us to spiritual and apostolic renewal, incorporating discernment, collaboration with others, and networking into our daily lives.

We are deeply convinced that the preferences will help the apostolic body of the Society if they maintain a clear unity between life and mission; if we understand them as orientations that go beyond “doing something” and enable us to achieve our transformation as persons, as religious communities, and as apostolic works and institutions in which we collaborate with others. Consequently, while each preference points to some important aspect of our apostolate, it also invites us to renew our own lives so that our work will be credible and effective.

The preferences seek to embody concretely the mission received as the Lord’s response to the cry of a wounded world; the cry of the most vulnerable, who have been displaced and marginalized; the empty rhetoric that divides and dismantles our cultures; the growing chasm between rich and poor; the cry of the young in search of hope and meaning; the cry of the earth and its peoples, who have been degraded to the point of having their very existence put at risk. The preferences seek to respond to a world in which entire generations have never heard about Jesus and his Gospel.

Our Church has been wounded by the sin of its members and all the suffering this has brought. Our Church is sailing in the midst of strong winds. In the Society we have become painfully and humbly aware of our own vulnerabilities and our sin. We feel shame and confusion when we stand before the Lord, asking him to forgive us, to heal us and to show us his merciful love. Only as sinners forgiven and loved can we continue forward. We can bring his compassion to others only if we ourselves, individually and as a body, have experienced that compassion. Indeed, it is our own experience of being loved and saved that gives our desire for mission its depth and energy. It is precisely in the challenges of our wounded world and our own wounds that we hear the gentle but insistent call of the Lord.

The universal apostolic preferences seek to deepen these processes of personal, communal, and institutional conversion. They are orientations for improving both the

¹⁴ Cf. *Autobiography* of Ignatius of Loyola [27].



apostolic work of the whole body of the Society and the ways in which we accomplish our ministries, in which the preferences are expressed. At the same time, they seek to help Jesuits and our companions in mission to make their apostolic lives a pathway to God. We want to invite all people to follow the path opened up by Jesus of Nazareth, a path on which we ourselves are walking, following in his footsteps, encouraged by his Spirit.

They are not our preferences. We have followed the Holy Spirit, who has guided and inspired us. We receive them confirmed by the Pope, trusting, like Ignatius and the first companions, that he is the one who has the best vision of the needs of the world and of the Church. The universal apostolic preferences will help us to overcome every form of self-centeredness and corporatism, so that we may become authentic collaborators in the Lord's mission, which we share with so many people inside and outside the Church. The preferences are an opportunity for us to feel that we are *the least Society in collaboration with others*.

III. The necessary personal, communal, and institutional conversion

The Contemplation to Attain Love¹⁵ begins with a point that seems to be common sense but which must be continually kept in mind: "Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words." The process of discerning the universal apostolic preferences filled the participants with a profound sense of gratitude for the abundant graces received. At the same time, we experienced a **strong call to personal, communal and institutional conversion**.

Receiving the preferences means that we initiate their implementation immediately by changing any styles of life or work that hinder the renewal of the persons, communities, and works committed to mission. We are inspired by the response of the first apostles, who promptly abandoned their nets and their lives as fishermen in order to set out on the path of discipleship following Jesus.¹⁶ After the promulgation of the preferences, all the apostolic units of the Society will be provided with resources to help planning their effective implementation.¹⁷ A necessary dimension of our conversion is **taking responsibility for seeking and properly managing the economic and financial resources** needed to support the apostolic initiatives inspired by the universal apostolic preferences.¹⁸

The call is to share the life and mission of Jesus Christ. At the heart of this call is the love of the One and Triune God who is not paralyzed in the face of the world's situation but who sends Jesus to take on our humanity and give his life in order to open the gates to divine life and love for all human beings. In dying Jesus expresses the supreme love that vanquishes death. To accept that call is **to give one's life for love expressed in deeds of reconciliation and justice**; it means being transformed into authentic followers of Jesus and active members of the Church and the Society that serves the mission in collaboration with so many other persons. **Conversion empowers us to take part in the mission:** conversion to faith in the Good News that the Reign of God is at hand, and conversion to a living faith that expresses itself in works that make possible the fulfillment of God's promise in human history.

¹⁵ *Spiritual Exercises* [230-237]. Cf. 1 Jn 3, 8.

¹⁶ Cf. Mk 1, 14-20.

¹⁷ For example, see <https://jesuits.global/uap>

¹⁸ "General Congregation 36 affirms that, keeping in mind our commitment to poverty, various financial strategies, opportunities, and implications must be considered in apostolic planning and decision-making at all levels of Society governance. The Treasurer and other skilled and knowledgeable persons should assist in these processes." (d. 2,18).



Keeping vividly in mind the experience of the first companions in Venice, GC 36 invites us to return to our roots. We reaffirm “what they ... found to be life-giving: sharing their lives together as friends in the Lord; living very close to the lives of the poor; and preaching the Gospel with joy.”¹⁹ Making our communities spaces for communal discernment where a life of prayer is encouraged, the Eucharist is shared and spiritual conversation is practiced enables us to share the gift of discernment as a way of letting ourselves be guided by the Spirit in apostolic works and in all ministries. Living simply, close to the poor, awakens the creativity we need to do more with less,²⁰ and it gives greater credibility to our apostolic work offered freely to others.

At the same time, responding to the call of the universal apostolic preferences necessitates that **we strive more than ever for the intellectual depth that our foundational charism and tradition demand; such depth must always be accompanied by an attendant spiritual depth.** The Society is committed to the *intellectual apostolate* because intellectual depth should characterize all forms of the apostolate of the Society of Jesus. **We want to continue serving the Church through the intellectual apostolate, expressing our faith with intellectual consistency.** Consequently, all members of this apostolic body are called to continue their formation throughout their lives. Intellectual depth demands habits of thought, and so we must not neglect ongoing formation. If we fail in this regard, the Society’s contribution to the mission of the Church will not respond to the demands of the Ignatian *magis*.

The apostolic renewal of the Society of Jesus that will flow from the implementation of the universal apostolic preferences has as a condition **the deepening of collaboration** among Jesuits and our companions in mission and among the ministries and apostolic units, other bodies in the Church, and all the persons and institutions that contribute to the inseparable realities of reconciliation among human beings, with creation, and with God. “That mission is deepened and ministry is extended by collaboration among all with whom we work,” states GC 36, confirming the orientations of GC 34 and GC 35.²¹

The experience we have had during the communal discernment of the preferences confirms the perception of GC 36: “Noting remarkable progress in collaboration across the Society, obstacles remain. ... Inclusive discernment and ongoing planning and evaluation of our efforts to go beyond the obstacles is required in order to mainstream the participation of mission partners further in various levels of the Society’s apostolic activities and governance.”²² Complete incorporation of the dimension of collaboration into our life-mission is an essential condition, one without which our desire to render greater service to the Lord’s mission will run the risk of not being realized in our works and our way of life.

With these universal apostolic preferences, we resolve to concentrate and concretize our vital apostolic energies during the next ten years, 2019-2029. We accept them as a mission of the Church through Pope Francis, who has approved them by confirming the communal discernment that was undertaken by the apostolic body. It corresponds to us, as a body obedient to the Holy Spirit, to plan with diligence the implementation of the preferences in every dimension of our life-mission. **The preferences seek to unleash a process of apostolic revitalization and creativity that makes us better servants of reconciliation and justice.**

¹⁹ GC 36 d. 1, 4.

²⁰ Cf. GC 36, d. 1, 11-16.

²¹ GC 36, d. 2, 6. Cf. GC35, d. 6, 30; GC 34, dd. 13 and 14.

²² GC 36, d. 2,7.



Let us undertake this process, designing it and assessing it *in accord with persons, times, and places* in the light of the Church's orientations and the Spirit's guidance.

May Our Lady, the Mother of the Society of Jesus, obtain for us from her Son the grace of integrity of life so that, preaching what allows us to know the Lord and doing what we preach, we may be witnesses of the love of God poured out upon humanity, and impelled by the Holy Spirit, we may effectively collaborate for the reconciliation of all things in Christ.

Rome, 19 February 2019

Arturo Sosa, S.I.
Superior General

Attachment: Letter of Pope Francis to Fr. Arturo Sosa, 6 February 2019

(Original: Spanish)