



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

Towards a Discernment in Common of Universal Apostolic Preferences Frequently asked Questions – November 2017

“GC 36 asks Father General to review the process —initiated by GC 34 and continued by Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach — to evaluate progress on our current apostolic preferences and, if appropriate, to identify new ones. Discernment of such preferences should include the greatest possible participation of the Society and of those involved with us in our mission. To this end, as indicated by GC 35, Father General and the Council should establish procedures for assessing the Society’s complex processes for apostolic planning at all levels and encourage the use of ongoing discernment and planning.” (GC 36, Decree 2, Paragraph 14)

1. Why is the General asking for this discernment of Preferences now? Surely the GC should have done it when it was in session?

The General is undertaking this consultation about preferences in order to fulfill the request of GC 36. The GC provided us with broad outlines as we go forward, specifically about a mission of reconciliation, and requested the ‘greatest possible involvement’. The General Congregation defined the mission of the Society as reconciliation with God, with others and with creation. Our challenge now is to find how to implement this. The formulation of universal apostolic preferences will be a step forward in the implementation process. The preferences will establish orientations and points of reference for the apostolic commitment of the Society at all levels during the next ten years. It is a collective discernment process.

2. Why don't we just use the results that came in from Discernment of the Calls asked for before the GC?

Prior to GC 36, Province and Regional Congregations were asked to discern the three calls of the Universal King. The Calls were broad orientations that helped guide GC 36 in its deliberations. Now, on the basis of the GC documents, the preferences are meant to identify more specific apostolic issues that promote reconciliation and justice and that can engage the resources of the universal Society.



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

3. Can the Curia give us a model for the process to help Major Superiors?

It would be hard to propose a unique model for this process since the Society is spread in so many parts of the world. Major Superiors are asked to adapt the process to the situation of their provinces/regions taking care to avoid conflict with existing processes of planning that are going on.

Discernment in common, as outlined in the July 2017 letter of Fr Sosa is an essential part of the process although perhaps not at every stage (see below #4). Whatever process the Major Superior decides on should ensure the involvement of a representative section of the Province and see that the group has the time, atmosphere and facilitation needed to engage in the discernment effectively.

4. “Discernment in common” is complex and not every apostolate or community will feel ready to engage in it. What does the Curia advise about this?

Discernment in common is needed in this process, but perhaps not at every level. For example, communities and apostolic leaders could engage in “spiritual conversation” and send reports to the provincial/regional superior, who would subsequently engage in a formal process of “discernment in common” with his staff and consultants. There is not a unique model for this process at the province or regional level.

5. How will the Society put together the results of individual provinces/regions?

In the period July to November 2018 (depending on when Conference meetings occur) the major superiors of the Conference will discern together after sharing with one another the fruit of the discernments done by individual major superiors with their teams. This should not be a mere synthesis of the reports but a real discernment. The results will then be sent to the General who will meet with the *Consiglio Allargato*¹ in January 2019 before making a final decision.

¹ The *Consiglio Allargato* consists of the Council of Fr General + the Conference Presidents + the Heads of Secretariats (Secondary and Pre-secondary education, Higher Education, Collaboration, Justice and Ecology)



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

6. If a province or region is engaged in a province/regional planning process, could this conflict with the discernment of universal preferences?

Province apostolic planning and the discernment of universal apostolic preferences are two processes that should be in dialogue and in harmony with each other; both processes take GC 36 as their starting point. Both can help each other.

The preferences add a universal perspective that is unique and different from the regional/ provincial level. The universal preferences invite everybody to have a perspective on the entire Society and the world where we serve while Regional, Conference or Province plans focus on the needs and priorities of a particular area.

The process to discern universal preferences in itself is a very important exercise that can even change the way provinces and regions perceive themselves.

Eventually, we are going to ask the Provinces/Regions to respond to the preferences selected by Fr. General, and work to implement the universal preferences. Action steps may then be incorporated into existing province/region plans.

7. Could Fr General give an example of what he means by a 'Universal Apostolic Preference'?

The General does not want to skew the consultation by suggesting possible preferences or starting points other than GC 36. But some elements of his recent letter can help to clarify:

"They have expressed and should still express in concrete terms our readiness, as a universal apostolic body, to work beneath the banner of the cross, to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff.

... apostolic preferences create for us the tension of seeking the most universal good as the ultimate goal of the numerous apostolic activities the Society carries out."

"the universal apostolic preferences become a horizon for [the] discernment in common"

"points of reference for the whole Society"



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

“ guidance about how to use ... resources effectively”

“a horizon, a point of reference, and an orientation”

Thus, universal apostolic preferences are important apostolic challenges or possibilities that call for responses that go beyond the capacity or resources of a single Province, Region or Conference and invite a common, collaborative response on the part of the universal Society of Jesus. The concerns of the Church and the Holy Father can point us in appropriate directions.

8. We cannot evaluate the past preferences because we don't know enough. For example, we do not know at local level about the impact on China or Africa of being named as a preference. Can the Curia provide a summary evaluation?

The General is calling for an *examen* of engagement with the current preferences rather than for an evaluation. He has in mind that people in each place will do an *examen* about their *own* engagement with that preference. This results of this *examen* received from all parts of the world will give Fr General a global insight into how the previous preferences impacted on the mission of the Society.

Hence, there is no need for local communities to seek information that would allow them to evaluate the experience of the universal Society about each of the five preferences. This could be a distraction that leans towards an evaluation which is external rather than promote an *examen* which involves us.

9. Who will decide in the end?

In January 2019, Fr General will make the final decision after hearing the discussion at the January *Consiglio Allargato*.

10. Who is involved in the discernment?

The General wants a broad consultation, including some of the men and women who are our partners in mission. It will surely call us all to a great openness and conversion. In fact, that conversion to ever deeper universality



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

will be a fruit of the process, regardless of the particular preferences arrived at.

11. Will the heads of Secretariats be asking people in every province for input and for discernment on this? If so, that will just repeat what the Major superiors are doing.

The heads of secretariat are meeting with their immediate advisors – usually one from each conference - and will feedback the results of this discernment to the *Consiglio Allargato* of January 2019. The heads of Secretariats will not be consulting locally. The local consultation needs to be inter-sectoral; we have to avoid being divided up into different interest groups.

12. How will the formation results be fed in?

Those in formation will be consulted according to the decision of each conference.

Common houses under Conference President:

The Conference Formation delegate is responsible to ensure there is a process involving all those in formation up to end of 2nd cycle studies. He will receive the report(s), make a discernment with some advisors and send it to the Conference President (with Fr Magadia in copy). The Conference president integrates the Formation report into his discernment with Major Superiors.

Formation houses under Province/Region jurisdiction

The Province/Region formation delegate is responsible to ensure there is a process involving all those in formation up to end of 2nd cycle studies. He will receive the report(s), make a discernment with some advisors and send it to the Major Superior who integrates it with the final province/region discernment.

- a. If there is shared responsibility for the house(s), the Major Superior should send it to the other Major Superiors who also will consider it in their discernment.
- b. For houses completely under a single province/region, the Major Superior decides how/whether to share the report with others (for example with Major Superiors who send men to the centre in question or to the Conference President).



Jesuit Curia in Rome

Office of Discernment and Apostolic Planning

- c. If there is a shared Delegate for a number of provinces/regions, each Major superior receives the report(s).

Local conditions may require a discerning adaptation of this. The main point is that Conference reports go to the Conference President and are considered at the Conference meeting; Province reports are considered at province level.

13. How will this affect the work of an individual Jesuit in the end?

Individual Jesuits and our collaborators will be asked to discern how they can implement universal preferences in the particular work in which they are engaged.

Provinces and Conferences will also be asked to discern how to implement and carry forward the newly defined preferences.