

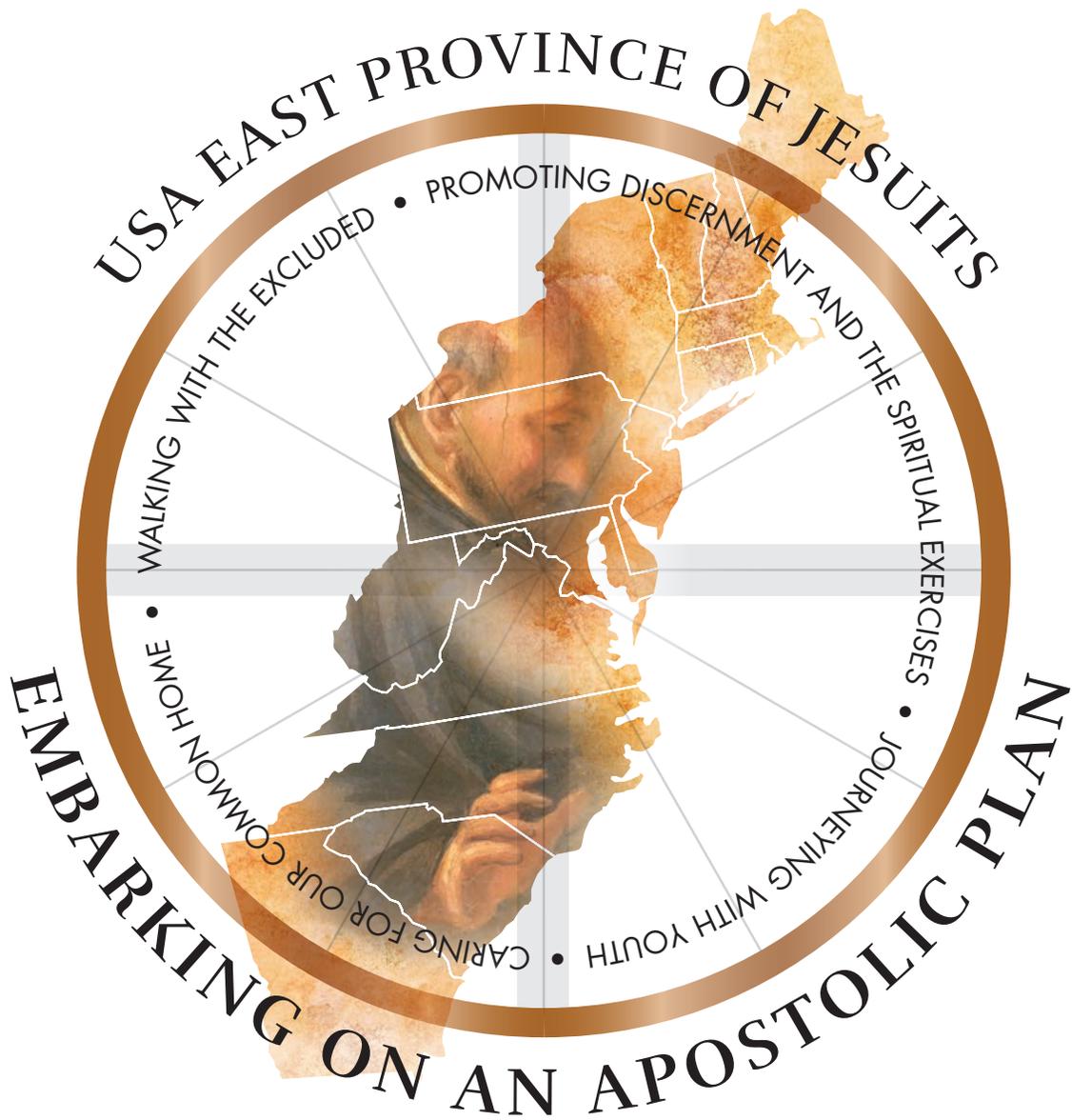
Amidst a Changing World, Jesuits Look *forward*

By Fr. John Swope, SJ

Provincial Assistant for Apostolic Planning

At the thirty-sixth General Congregation in 2016, the assembled Jesuits elected Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ, as Superior General of the Society of Jesus and recommended that Fr. Sosa call Jesuit provinces around the world to engage in apostolic planning. Fr. Sosa has made that a priority during his first years in office. To date, more than half of the provinces across the globe have completed their plans.





Last September, Fr. Joseph O’Keefe, SJ, Provincial of Jesuits USA East, announced to the province that we were embarking on a two-year Apostolic Planning process. The heritage Provinces of Maryland, New England and New York were canonically unified as one in 2020, and Fr. O’Keefe sees these first years as a foundational moment for the new USA East Province. The province now encompasses sixteen states from Maine to Georgia, plus Washington, DC, with a combined population of

100,000,000. Our planning must embrace our vast region and ministries. As a new province, the invitation to Jesuits and lay colleagues is to “Discover Anew the Call of Christ.”

My sense is that Jesuits and lay colleagues are being drawn toward a significant chapter in the life of Ignatius: the late 1530s, when he and his companions prayed and discussed together what kind of apostolic body they would be. They were led by the Holy Spirit to discover the outlines of what would eventually become the

Society of Jesus. Today, USA East Jesuits are reaffirming the vision of Ignatius that we are, above all, an apostolic body of vowed men in service to the Church. At the same time, the Society of Jesus has been blessed by lay colleagues who want to share in our mission. Together we are being called to a Province-wide spiritual experience of communal apostolic discernment with a view to setting our course into the future.

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What is Apostolic Planning?

The purpose of apostolic planning is to assist the Provincial in deploying human, physical and financial resources to better serve the Church and to live out the four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs) of the Global Society of Jesus more fully. Over the next decade, the Jesuit mission will focus on these UAPs:

- Showing the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and the practice of discernment;
- Walking with the poor, the outcasts of the world, and those whose dignity has been violated, in the mission of reconciliation and justice;
- Walking together with young people, to build a hope-filled future;
- Working together to care for the earth, our common home.

An effective apostolic plan must be:

- Reasonable: reflective of Province resources (based in reality).
- Actionable: specific enough to be put into action (does not sit on a shelf).

- Recognizable: reflective of what we asked Jesuits and lay colleagues to contribute (meets expectations).
- Helpful: assists the Provincial in making decisions and realizing our mission.

How will we create our apostolic plan?

The USA East Jesuits can be considered as “out of practice” with apostolic planning. The last time we engaged in this type of process was 1988. The timetable for apostolic planning so far has been one of comprehensive research, drawing on best practices from other Jesuit provinces around the world, extensive preparation of background materials for participants, and the orientation and training of leaders of the sessions of communal apostolic discernment.

Jesuits and lay colleagues are called to trust that the Holy Spirit will be revealed to us through the process of communal apostolic discernment. As Ignatius and his companions did in the late 1530s as they prepared the

foundational document describing the charism of the Society of Jesus, we will discern the movements of spirit to seek and find the will of God for our shared apostolic future.

1 Phase One

As we look toward the fall, Jesuits and lay colleagues are engaged this summer in remote spiritual preparation. We are slowly turning our minds and hearts toward God, praying and reflecting individually, asking God that we may become more attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The actual deliberations about our new apostolic plan will take place over several months this fall. During this time, the more than thirty Jesuit communities will meet three times. More than 300 lay colleagues and some Jesuits will participate in one of twelve one-day regional gatherings from Maine to Georgia. Our mission in Micronesia will develop its own apostolic plan.





Composed of Jesuits and lay colleagues, the Advisory Board for Apostolic Planning will play a central role in Phase 2 of our Apostolic Discernment.

Front Row: Marianne Gallagher, Fr. Jack Hanwell, SJ, Fr. Joseph O’Keefe, SJ, Mary McGinnity, Fr. Michael Davidson, SJ.
 Back Row: Fr. John Swope, SJ, Fr. James Croghan, SJ, Fr. Kevin O’Brien, SJ, Fr. Brian Konzman, SJ, Fr. Patrick Nolan, SJ, Fr. Sam Sawyer, SJ, Frank Knott, Brendan Gottschall, SJ, Joseph Raia, Fr. Claudio Burgaleta, SJ, Fr. James Ferus, SJ, Donna Rapaccioli.

Based on thoughtful analysis of our social, cultural, and religious context, and relying on demographic and financial studies, Jesuits and lay colleagues will engage together in communal apostolic discernment. As each one reflects on these realities, we will experience movements of spirit. Some will be full of hope and energy, while others will leave us flat and unengaged. In an atmosphere of spiritual conversation, Jesuits and lay colleagues will reveal their ideas to others in their small groups. These others will be actively listening, observing their own movements of spirit about what is being spoken. The Holy Spirit will reveal through our minds and hearts the outline of apostolic priorities.

2 Phase Two

With the reports from the regional gatherings and the Jesuit communities in hand, the work on developing the actual plan will begin. From January to August 2023, we will rely on communal apostolic discernment to provide content and direction for the drafting of the plan, which will

be the responsibility of myself and the Apostolic Planning Advisory Board. This work will be supported by the Provincial staff in New York.

In closing

The USA East Province embarks on this journey in turbulent times for our nation and the world. I have wondered if the unusual turbulence we are experiencing today bears any similarity in intensity to what Ignatius and his companions experienced when they were discerning how they wanted to be of service to the Church.

Ignatius and his companions also lived “amidst a changing world.” Between the birth of Ignatius in 1491 and the approval of the Charism of the Society in 1540, the world had changed dramatically. In 1491, no one knew that there were two huge continents located some 3,500 miles from where Ignatius lived. Magellan reached the Pacific on his way around the globe. Martin Luther was excommunicated. The Age of Discovery had begun with conquest and colonization. The world was at the dawn of the Age of Modernism.

Then, between 1540 and 1550, the first ten years after the approval of the Charism of the Society of Jesus, the world changed fast. Silver and gold were pouring into Europe from America. The Roman Inquisition was in full swing. John Calvin published his catechism. The colonizers in America were given permission to practically enslave indigenous peoples. Jesuits arrived in Brazil in 1549, and the Reductions in Paraguay, Brazil, and the Argentine were being developed. The opening of the Council of Trent was taking place. And there were wars in many places.

To discern the outlines of the Society, Ignatius and his companions listened attentively to the cries of the Church and society. In the same spirit, we will be attentive to the Universal Apostolic Preferences and will prayerfully imagine hearing the cries of people searching for God, the cries of the poor and excluded, the cries of young people yearning for hope, and the cries of the earth in need of care.

All ministerial initiatives in our apostolic plan will flow from our deep listening to those cries. ■