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## Jesuits Elect a Venezuelan as the New General

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shedding light on the magnificent beauty of God's creation, he is also amplifying the charism of dialogue needed to inhabit this fundamental mystery and to dwell in its complication. Even against those who see in Francis' cultivation of dialogue a too heterodox capitulation to contemporary culture (and a material cause for retreat into the "Benedict option," feckless #Notmypope tweets, and the like), Francis is fulfilling the ideal of pope precisely as *pontifex* – as bridge for persons trapped in the sclerosis of their own egos. For many, Francis' unregulated love for dialogue is just too shocking. He recognizes the power of tribalism and

xenophobia, and he demonstrates that the only response is mercy, a mercy that travels on the rails of dialogue towards fuller expressions of humanity and compassion.

## Teaching the Charism

When we take words seriously – as God in Jesus takes the Word seriously – things truly open up. When a good word is abroad in the world, language is laid bare and discloses its nourishing power for those prepared to hear. As Lukianoff and Haidt observed, rather than

# Jesuits Elect a Venezuelan as the New General

By Patrick J. Howell, S.J.

**The 36th Jesuit** General Congregation in October elected Fr. Arturo Sosa, S.J., of Venezuela to succeed Fr. Adolfo Nicolás as Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Earlier Fr. Nicolás, who recently turned 80, submitted his resignation to the General Congregation.

Born in 1948 in Caracas, Venezuela, into an open-minded Catholic family, Fr. Arturo Sosa was educated from an early age to cultivate an attitude of curiosity that goes beyond ordinary appearances. He entered the Society on September 14, 1966, and during his regency he was sent to Gumilla, one of the first centers of research and social action for peasant cooperatives. He then studied in Rome, where he experienced the international character of the Society. After this he pursued studies in political science at the Uni-

versidad Central of Venezuela and became editor the review *Sic* at the Centro Gumilla.

He has attended four general congregations, the first was G.C. 33 in 1983 when he was only 34, the youngest delegate in attendance. After serving as provincial of Venezuela and later as rector of the Catholic University of Táchira, Father Sosa was called to Rome by Father Nicolás in 2014 to take charge of the international houses, which include the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, as well as the Jesuit residences. As a visiting professor at Georgetown in 2004, he taught in the Latin American Studies program. He is fluent in Spanish, Italian, and English and understands French.

In a remarkable visit to the congregation just after the election of Father Sosa, Pope Francis visited all of the Jesuit delegates at the Jesuit curia – a first for any pope. The tradition had been that the delegates all trooped over to see and hear the pope after the election of a new general. The Holy Father warmly embraced the new Father General and thanked the Jesuits for their fidelity and devotion to the church and to all humankind. He detailed three areas for the Society's path into the future:

- The first is to "ask insistently for consolation." The Society must know how to bring consolation and real joy to others; the Jesuits must put themselves at the service of joy, for the Good News cannot be announced in sadness.

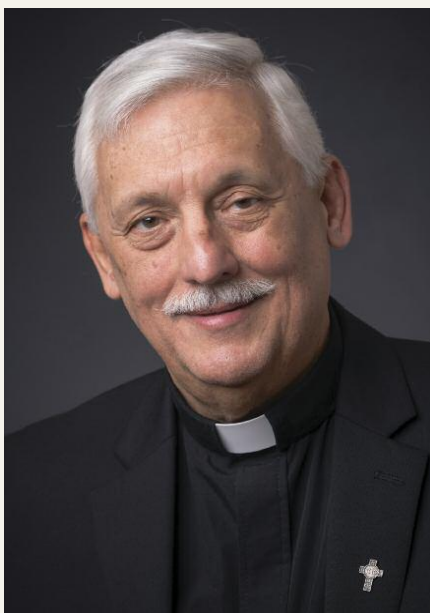
“trying to protect students from words and ideas that they will inevitably encounter, colleges should do all they can to equip students to thrive in a world full of words and ideas that they cannot control.” One of the great truths taught by philosophy, they add, “is that one can never achieve happiness by making the world conform to one’s desires.” The Ignatian reply is that it is precisely through dialogue that we begin to understand the need to surrender our desires to God so that, transformed by grace and ordered to the good, we better understand the mystery of happiness and enter into its vast complexity. To teach the art of honest dialogue

then is where hope for peace and justice thrives, whether in the classroom, the public square, the margins, or online. This tradition is one of the greatest gifts we can provide for our students and for the world.

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- “Allow yourselves to be moved by the Lord on the cross.” The Jesuits must get close to the vast majority of men and women who suffer and offer mercy in various forms.
- Go forward under the influence of the “good spirit.” Discerning is more than simply reflecting. The Jesuits must not be “clerical” but “ecclesial.” They are “men for others” who live in the midst of all peoples, touch the heart of each person, and contribute in this way to establishing a church in which all have their place, in which the Gospel is inculturated, and in which each culture is evangelized.

Following the election of the General, the 215 delegates got down to the business of the governance of the Society and whatever else needed to be addressed. They decided not to construct multiple major documents. But they did discuss, discern, and decided upon many other items but then left them to the general for the new day-to-day governance.



Though this congregation did not produce many documents, it did make these points:

- In a time of a loss of the sense of God, Jesuits want to participate in the great ministry of reconciliation based on justice, faith, and solidarity with the poor.
- To achieve this, Jesuits need to have discerning local communities where simplicity of life and openness of heart allow them

to reach out and to share with others.

- The Jesuits seek to be “men on fire with the Gospel passion.” Imbuing themselves with the Spiritual Exercises will enable a constant spiritual renewal and enflame them to meet others with a discerning compassion and a compassionate discernment.
- Jesuits are reminded especially of their role in fighting against inequalities and seeking the common good. In our time, *Laudato Si’* inspires the Jesuits to care for our common home and the poor who are most affected by environmental degradation.

It seems fitting to close with the pope’s three words, which are graces for each Jesuit, for the whole Society, and for all of the lay collaborators: consolation, compassion, and discernment.

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