



Jesuits' Apostolic Preferences for Today

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On February 19, 2019, the General of the Society of Jesus has revealed their Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) for the next 10 years. Venezuelan-born Jesuit Superior General Father Arturo Sosa, popularly known as the Black Pope, said the UAP would guide the Society of Jesus forward, inspired by the discernment of the spirits, concern for the excluded, care for the environment, and journeying with young people.

In his letter addressed to the 15,536 Jesuits worldwide, Sosa elaborated on the four guiding principles. These include the promotion of discernment and spiritual exercises, walking with the excluded, accompanying the young in their journey and caring for our common home. These are the universal apostolic preferences set by the Society of Jesus for the next decade, 2019-2029.

Approved by the Pope

These preferences are officially approved by the Pope Francis, himself a Jesuit. The universal apostolic preferences of the Jesuits “are in harmony with the current apostolic prior-

ities of the Church expressed through the ordinary magisterium of the Pope, the synods, the episcopal conferences, especially in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*,” the Pope emphasized in a letter addressed to the Jesuit General, Father Arturo Sosa on Feb 6, 2019.

What has been undertaken, the Pontiff added, is a “dynamic discernment”, not a “library or labour” process. Pope Francis stressed that the first UAP was “fundamental because it presupposes as a basic condition the relation of the Jesuit with the Lord, his personal and communitarian life of prayer and discernment.” “Without this prayerful attitude, the rest will not function,” he added in his official letter.

The Background

The apostolic preferences are the result of a process of discernment that lasted almost two years. It began with the General Congregation of the Jesuits in October 2016, that elected Fr Sosa as the 31st General of the Society of Jesus. Numerous meetings, discussions, group encounters, spiritual conversations and moments of prayerful discernment led to the selection of the preferences, which took two years in the making.

The UAP which deals with “four vital areas,” inspire Jesuits “in their discernment and in apostolic planning,” Sosa added. They are the points of reference, horizons and orientations for the entire Society of Jesus. They emphasize how Jesuits can “make better use of the means at their disposal to serve Christ's reconciling mission in the world.” They are the Jesuits’ response to the needs of the Church. These preferences were selected “through socio-political analysis, theological and pastoral reflection and discernment”.

a. Promoting discernment through spiritual exercises

Illustrating these four apostolic preferences, Fr. Sosa told Vatican News that genuine discernment is a necessity for the Church today. The Spiritual Exercises, he added, are a preferential path for the Jesuits. It is also fundamental, as far as the exercises are concerned, to take the path of creativity. According to the Jesuit General, new forms must be found so that the exercises adapt to different groups, realities and contexts.

b. Walking with the excluded

Walking with those who are discarded, said Father Sosa, means approaching the world of the poor and going to the suburbs to meet the people. “We want to take a path, he added, to promote social justice. “We want to promote a change in the economic, political and social structures that cause injustice. “We want to eliminate the scourge of abuse from the life of the Church and society,” a sad fact that the Jesuit General said is manifest out in various forms, including in sexual abuse and abuse of power.

c. Accompanying young people

According to Fr. Sosa, walking with young people also means looking at the world from their perspective. Young people, he explained, can help understand the changes in society, to grasp the sense of a new culture. We must therefore “open up spaces for young people, for their creativity”, he said, adding they must also learn from the young.

d. Caring for the common home

The fourth preference concerns our common home, this earth. Father Sosa said we must try to participate in urgent

actions that can help prevent environmental destruction. Alternative formulas and creative action must also be sought to rediscover the earth as our beloved home, which we need to protect.

Father Sosa said the UAP was unlikely to cover all bases for Jesuits in their myriad missions around the world due to the different “needs of the Church in particular territories with specific conditions.”

The Jesuit Superior General responded by writing, “we realize that unless we live The Spiritual Exercises – if we are not persons who engage in discernment – we cannot help others or contribute to others in discernment. We have to live them deeply.”

These priorities were well received by the Indian Jesuits. Fr MK George, Provincial of Kerala maintained that these priorities are “both relevant and timely.” Fr Edward Mudavassery, former Provincial of South Asia said: “Personally I am thrilled at the choice of the 4 UAP by the Society of Jesus. Undoubtedly Pope Francis has been an inspirational figure ever since he began his Pontificate to bring to focus and urgency these four areas to address the burning problems of the world and the Church.” Fr Bhausahab Sansare, Rector, Papal Seminary says the preferences reflect the optimism that the society feels for the world, in spite of the challenges. He added that “we can collectively be part of the solution.” Fr George Pattery, President of South Asian Assistancy, reiterates that “UAP the mood and sentiments of our times and holds hope and courage for the youth, especially in viewing secularizaion as 'signs of the time' and a critique of 'religious world'. That our Earth is a common home provides a large frame work for all religions and cultures to work together. the marginalized are part of

this common home.”

The General is visiting Mumbai, Goa and Pune in March 2019. Fr Selva Rathinam, President, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth is “excited to have the presence of Fr General, who will enlighten us more on these preferences both in words and deeds.” [From *The Smart Companion*]

Sijmplicity, Humility and Joy

Certain date and person cannot be erased from my life. One such person is superior general of Society of Jesus, Very Rev Fr Arturo Sosa, and the date is on 6th of March 2019. I had a long desire of seeing the black pope (excuse me for using the term which Very Rev Fr Arturo Sosa, may not like much), this desire become a reality on 6th of March. I did not speak with him personally. I, being a Papalite had the privilege of listening to him twice: firstly during the mass, next in the papal seminary hall where he addressed the papal seminary community. Apart from it I had the privilege of observing his moves and steps in and around the campus. In all these situations, I never came across the person called Superior General of Society of Jesus, rather a simple ALTER CHRISTUS. I mean the statement what I made. I saw in him the divine virtues which make a great leader to be the servant of God. Simplicity and humility of, Very Rev Fr Arturo Sosa, challenges me to encounter the pride and modernity within myself. The passion for the Church and for Christ is clearly seen in his homily and in the address which he gave to the Papal Seminary community. Another important aspect which I liked and loved in him was the Spirit of Pope Francis which he carries through his conduct and through his homilies. He emphasised the virtue of joy and indeed he left behind to all of the joy. I can now proudly say that I have met another living Christ in my life. I pray that church may form lot more Fr Arturo Sosa, to the world

-Joseph Mathalai Muthu