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 **The Jesuit Curia in Rome**

 **Borgo S. Spirito, 4, 00193 Roma (Italia)**

**Backgrounder: General Congregations in the Society of Jesus**

**What is a General Congregation?**

A General Congregation is the supreme governing body of the Society of Jesus. It is summoned on the death or resignation of a Superior General to elect his successor and also may be convened to legislate changes in the structure and work of the Society of Jesus.

Ordinary direction and control of the Jesuit order is in the hands of the Superior General, who is elected for life, and those he appoints for limited terms as Superiors. The Superior General governs in accordance with Church law and with the Constitutions and legislation of the order.

**When will the Society of Jesus hold its next General Congregation?**

Since the Society of Jesus was founded in 1540, there have been 35 General Congregations. The Plenary Session of GC 36 will convene in Rome on October 3, 2016.

GC 36 was convoked by Superior General Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, 80, who has served since 2008 and has announced his intention to resign.

After accepting the resignation of Father General Nicolás and electing a new Superior General, the Congregation will also deliberate issues of importance concerning the life and apostolic activity of the Society of Jesus in the 21st century.

**Why are General Congregations summoned?**

According to the norms laid down by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, there are two reasons for calling a General Congregation: the *election* *of a new Superior General* or *very important matters pertaining to the good of the whole Society.*

**Who preceded Father General Adolfo Nicolás as Superior General?**

In 1983, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, was elected Superior General when Father General Pedro Arrupe, SJ, resigned because of ill health. After serving as Superior General for 25 years, Father Kolvenbach, submitted his resignation to General Congregation 35.

**Who attends a General Congregation?**

The official members of a General Congregation are drawn from the Superior General’s staff and from the body of the Jesuit order. Regional divisions of the order, called provinces, send the provincial superiors of those provinces. Then, each province elects a number of delegates according to the percentage of the total number of Jesuits. Most provinces in the world will send one delegate in addition to the Provincial.

The total member count of General Congregation 36 is 215 (209 electors, 3 *ex officio* and 3 appointed by Father General).

**How will the Congregation conduct its business?**

General Congregation 36 will be run in accordance with a 56-page code of procedure called the “Formula” of a General Congregation, which is drawn from the Constitutions of the Jesuit order and the regulations of previous General Congregations.

The preparatory work for the Congregation is handled by a 14-member preparatory commission (*Coetus Praevius*), appointed by the Superior General. The commission has a twofold task: 1) to review requests and suggestions (postulates) forwarded by provinces around the world and select those that will be considered and 2) to draft a preliminary report that will be used for the initial deliberations.

With the draft preliminary report in their hands, the electors (delegates) met in the six Conferences (Africa, Asia Pacific, South Asia, Europe, Latina America, and Canada-USA) in October 2015 to begin the initial phase of General Congregation 36. The Conferences each elected one member to sit on the Coordinating Committee, which then took charge of the preparations for the second phase, the plenary session, which begins on October 3, 2016.

**How will voting be done?**

The election of the Superior General requires more than 50% of the votes. A two-thirds majority is required if the subject being voted on involves a change to the Jesuit Constitutions or a matter that touches on legislation of the Holy See that is beyond the jurisdiction of the General Congregation.

**How long will GC 36 last?**

The Congregation will last until it has completed its business. GC 35 (2008) was 58 days, GC 34 (1995) was 96 days, while GC 31 (1965, 1966) met in two sessions for a total of 141 days.

**Where will GC 36 be held?**

Members of GC 36 will gather in Rome at the Jesuit Curia, the worldwide headquarters of the Society of Jesus. The Curia is a large compound, just steps from the Vatican.

Jesuits will meet in the Aula (Latin for hall), a large meeting room that can hold 250 delegates. The Aula is the top floor of a building tucked in between the Curia and another building that houses Jesuits. The Aula, which is getting a technology retrofit for this General Congregation, has offices, computers and meeting space on the ground level.

The first 19 General Congregations were all held at the Roman house where St. Ignatius lived and died, next door to the Church of the Gesù.