

## Jesuits

### Exploring the Jesuit and Catholic dimensions of the university's mission

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Jesuits are members of a Catholic religious order of men founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola. They are more formally called "The Society of Jesus" or, in Latin countries, "The Company of Jesus." The term "Jesuit" was originally meant to be a mocking nickname, but in time it has come into common use. The Jesuits are the largest religious order in the Catholic church, with more than 18,000 members working in 112 countries.

Online resources about the Jesuits – both official and unofficial – are numerous. The web site of the international Jesuit headquarters in Rome is at <http://www.sjweb.info/index.cfm>, that of the U.S. Jesuits at <http://www.jesuit.org/>, and these will lead to many others.

For a brief history of the Society, see the chapter, "[Ignatius, the Jesuits, and Jesuit Education](#)," in *What are We? An introduction to Boston College and Its Jesuit Tradition*. The standard history of the order in English is William V. Bangert's *A History of the Society of Jesus* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, June 1986). The most authoritative discussion of the early Jesuits is by John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Harvard University Press, 1993). O'Malley has also proposed a stimulating analysis of the ministries generated by Jesuits' distinctive charism: "Five Missions of the Jesuit Charism: Content and Method," in *Studies in Spirituality of Jesuits* 38:4 (2006).

In more recent times, there have been studies on individual Jesuits from the early period of the Society. The most monumental of these is Georg Schurhammer's, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, a four-volume work published in Rome in 1973 and again in 1982. The introduction to the first volume is a masterful summary of the early years of the first Jesuits and well worth any time given to it. Two more recent volumes are those that have been written by William V. Bangert: *Claude Jay and Alfonso Salmeron, Two Early Jesuits*, (Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1985) and *Jerome Nadal, S.J. 1507-1580, Tracking the First Generation of Jesuits* (Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1992).

The General Congregations of the Society of Jesus are its legislative body; the documents of these congregations, especially the more recent ones, shed a helpful light on the Society and its understanding of its ministries. General Congregations are held for two reasons: either to elect a superior general and/or to address matters of greater moment, hence the title of a collection in English of the decrees of the pre-Vatican II General Congregations, *For Matters of Greater Moment, The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations--A Brief History and a Translation of the Decrees*, by John W. Padberg, S.J., et al (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis,

1994), which gives a very succinct introduction to the significance of these gatherings and provides a readable translation of their decrees.

There is a quantum leap in substance and style, however, between the first thirty General Congregations, with their focus primarily on common life and juridical questions, and the post-Vatican II congregations, which attempt to situate Jesuit life and ministry in the context of contemporary culture and to formulate a spiritual theology that will inspire Jesuits and their colleagues in their work. The best known of these are the 32nd General Congregation (1974-1975), because it linked "the service of faith" with "the promotion of justice" as constitutive elements in every Jesuit ministry, and the 34th General Congregation (1995) for several documents: on inter-religious dialogue, on inter-cultural dialogue, on partnership between Jesuits and lay men and women, and on Jesuits and women. The most recent 35th General Congregation (2008) elected a new superior general, Adolfo Nicolas, and published several documents locating the Society's ministries amid the challenges of a global culture. The documents of the most recent congregations are available on line and in a single volume, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31st-35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009).

An online chronology of significant dates in Jesuit history can be found at <http://www.sjweb.info/jesuits/chronShow.cfm>.