

THE PASTORAL MINISTRY TODAY – VISION AND ENTERPRISE

(A paper for presentation at the Jesuit West Zone Workshop on Mission,
Ishwani Kendra, Pune, 27-29 December 2004)

- **Gerard Rodricks SJ**
- **Luke Rodrigues SJ**

Historical Background

The Formula of the Institute of the Society of Jesus clearly mentions that the Society “was founded chiefly to engage in the defence and propagation of the faith, the promotion of Christian life and principles, through public sermons and lectures, as well as any other ministry of the word of God and the Spiritual Exercises, ...” (FI 1). From this we gather that pastoral work - in its broad meaning as spiritual care of people – has always been a priority for the Society.

It was the Jesuit Residence however, and not the parish, that was envisioned as the base for ministries of a pastoral nature. St. Ignatius was not in favour of Jesuits getting attached to parishes and legislated this in the Constitutions. “ So too, since Jesuits must be ready to go wherever in the world they may be sent by the Sovereign Pontiff or their superiors, they must not take up stable pastoral responsibilities, ...” (Const. 588). The parishes in the days of Ignatius were connected with benefices and monetary gain and a pastor would receive a lifetime appointment to a parish. Given the strong views that Ignatius had on poverty and availability, the exclusion of parishes from our ministries was only to be expected. Nadal would compare this situation with the examples of Peter and Paul. The diocesan clergy were called to follow in Peter’s footsteps and provide pastoral care within institutional structures. The Jesuits were to follow the example of Paul by being available to travel anywhere for the service of God and the help of souls.

Thus there arose a situation, lasting for about four centuries, where Jesuits were free to engage in pastoral activities such as preaching the Word and giving the Spiritual Exercises while staying away from the responsibilities and privileges of the parishes of

those days. It is true that Jesuits did indeed take up pastoral work in the context of a parish, but this was only as a response to a pressing need. Right up to the 1960s, there was very little ongoing reflection on the pastoral ministry and the taking up of parishes was still considered inappropriate to our apostolic ventures.

A lot of this changed with the Second Vatican Council and recent Jesuit sources that followed the Council. A new thinking came in which brought about radical changes in our approach to the pastoral ministry and our attitude towards parishes.

The Second Vatican Council

This seminal event in the history of the Church deepened, among other things, our understanding of Christian life and Mission.

- The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church affirmed that mission belonged to the whole People of God – a People who are furnished with various gifts from the Spirit. It pointed out that all the faithful participate in the one priesthood of Christ and are called upon to exercise this priesthood. All priests, both diocesan and religious, were to collaborate in the pastoral work of the whole diocese and of the Church. (Cf. LG 4, 10, 28)
- Another major work of the Council, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, affirmed the essential goodness of all creation and the duty of the Church to respond to the signs of the times. The social nature of humans was recognized and attention drawn to our involvement in social problems. The document decried the split between faith and daily life and emphasized that the Church was to be fully present at the very heart of human activity. (Cf. GS 4, 25, 42, 43)
- The Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church stressed the importance of pastoral care of the faithful and the role of the parish in this regard. The procedure for the transfer and retirement of pastors was simplified. Religious priests were reminded that they belong to the clergy of the diocese and should be ready to accept parishes if so required. (Cf. CD 30, 31, 35)

- The role of the laity in the Church's Mission was highlighted in The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. Laypersons were encouraged to participate more widely in various Church apostolates including those closely connected with pastoral duties. Bishops and pastors of parishes were to promote such activities within their jurisdictions and provide the laity with necessary support and formation (cf. AA 2, 9, 24, 25)
- In the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, the Council asks priests to be familiar with the life conditions of people as good shepherds who know their sheep. The pastor had obligations towards all persons, especially the poor and the lowly. Community building was an essential part of his office. The priest should never look upon an ecclesiastical office as a source of revenue or profit. The just recompense which a priest should receive for his labours is to be fundamentally the same for all those operating in the same circumstances. (Cf. PO 3, 6, 17, 20)
- The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church asserts that the Church is missionary by her very nature. The work of preaching the gospel is a duty that weighs upon the Church. This work must be preceded by authentic Christian witness and followed up by efforts to build up the local community and make it self-reliant. New communities are to draw upon customs and traditions of the local culture. (Cf. AG 2, 5, 11, 13, 15, 22)

Recent Jesuit Sources

The Council had reemphasized the importance of pastoral work and pointed out that it should be relevant to the lives of people. It called upon religious to see parish work as a part of their contribution to the Church's mission. Parish structures were changed so that they no longer were connected with assured revenue or lifelong appointments. The Jesuits responded positively to these developments.

- The Thirty-First General Congregation devoted a decree to Pastoral work, which was to be energetically promoted and made to answer contemporary needs. (Cf. GC 31, D. 27, 1). The taking up of parishes by Jesuits is mentioned for the first time. "The care of souls in a parish, in general, is no longer to be said to be

- contrary to the principles of the *Constitutions*, now that the discipline of the Church in regard to parishes committed to religious has been changed.” (GC 31, D.27, 10)
- The Thirty-Second General Congregation did not pay great attention to the pastoral apostolate and mentions parish work only in passing. However, it gave us an underlying truth that “the mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.” (GC 32, D.4, 2). The pastoral apostolate would have to integrate the justice dimension into all its efforts.
 - In order to provide clearer direction, Fr. Arrupe wrote Some Guidelines for the Parish Apostolate in 1979. This letter mentioned that the door was open to the parish apostolate provided it fit into the pattern of the apostolic priorities of the Society. The parish was recognized as having great possibilities for relevant pastoral work, providing a constant interface between the Word of God and social reality.
 - It was the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation that firmly put parish work on the map of Jesuit apostolates. Decree 19 on the Parish Ministry spells out the goals and characteristics of the Jesuit Parish. GC 34 also emphasized that the dimensions of Justice, Inculturation and Interreligious Dialogue must find an important place in all our apostolic works. This gave indispensable criteria around which pastoral work has to be developed today.
 - Finally, there is the address that Fr. Kolvenbach made at the JEPSA convention in 1997 titled Challenges of Jesuit Parish Ministry. Striking a positive note throughout, Fr. General remarked that the parish is a setting within which the drama of life unfolds. Taking up pastoral work in a parish gives us an opportunity to be with people in their daily struggles and empower them.

Characteristics of the Pastoral Ministry today

GC 34 reminds us that Jesuit pastoral ministry should be in line with the policies of the local Church, participate in the apostolic priorities of the Society and Province and be

according to our way of proceeding (cf. n. 422). In the light of the policies of the Church and Society as discussed above, we can put down the following characteristics that should distinguish our pastoral ministry today:

1. In Service of Christ's Mission

To be 'with Christ' is central to the charism of the Society. The Society's ministries are derived from Christ and must be a part of His saving mission. "The mission of the Society derives from our continuing experience of the Crucified and Risen Christ who invites us to join him in preparing the world to become the completed Kingdom of God." (GC 34, 31). Be it preaching the Word, celebrating the Sacraments or building up community, the Jesuit pastor is ever mindful that he labours with Christ and shares the identity of his master (cf. Mt 10: 16-25, Sp.Ex. 91-98)

2. Energized by Ignatian Spirituality

The Spiritual Exercises remain a privileged instrument for enabling people to encounter God in a powerful manner. Recent Congregations have reaffirmed that the ministry of the Exercises is one of the most important we can undertake today and that the spirit of the Exercises should pervade every other ministry of the Word. Direction regarding individual and communal discernment is another important help we can offer. (Cf. GC 32, 107; GC 34, 423)

3. Solidarity with the Poor

The promotion of justice is integral to all forms of Jesuit ministries including pastoral service. Pastors are to remember the example of Our Lord who welcomed outcasts and sought out those who were lost (cf. Lk 15:3; 19:10). Pastoral work, especially that in a parish, offers a favourable context to live with the poor and be in solidarity with them. Our priestly service of the faith demands a life in which the justice of the Gospel shines out in efforts to secure the rights of the powerless and bring about reconciliation (cf. GC 32, 67). "In its service of the faith, a Jesuit parish is called upon to develop strategies to promote local and global justice by means of both personal conversion and structural change." (GC 34, 425)

4. Openness to Interreligious Dialogue

Pastoral work is not limited to sacramental care of Christians only but is also an occasion to interact with people of all faiths. Spiritual guidance and the giving of the Exercises can be offered to all men and women of good will. The parish serves as an excellent meeting ground for everybody in the locality. It is here that we can fruitfully engage in the fourfold dialogue of life, action, religious experience and theological exchange. (Cf. GC 34, 131).

5. Committed to Inculturation

The mystery of the Incarnation constantly challenges us to situate God's Word in the context of the local culture. Our lives and efforts must be rooted in the culture of the people. We work for cultural transformation, reinforcing the good elements in a culture and resisting those that are contrary to gospel values. Jesuit pastors are committed to the creation of local churches and must constantly seek ways to promote indigenous theology, liturgy and spirituality. (Cf. GC 34, 126).

6. Oriented towards Community and Partnership

In a rapidly changing world, the role of the priest as community-builder is increasingly gaining importance. His ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor 5: 18) is one of promoting harmony at all levels. The Jesuit pastor must also pay attention to the emphasis the Society places on lay collaboration. He has to encourage the laity in their apostolate and provide opportunities for the development of their qualities and talents. Training is required for the Jesuits too to develop their capacity for collaboration with the laity. Collaboration also includes working closely with the Diocese, other religious, NGOs and peoples of other faiths in a combined effort to build a better world. (Cf. GC 34, 72, 339, 344)

7. Creativity and Relevance

Pastoral services need to be relevant to the life and needs of people. Programmes and activities must be adapted to include issues that touch people intimately such as advocacy

for the marginalized, Human Rights, the employment situation, changing family patterns, care for the environment etc. All of this calls for creativity and intellectual alertness. (Cf. GC 34, 55, 422, 431)

Current Pastoral Practices

There are a number of pastoral services being offered by Jesuits in the West Zone that are in keeping with the above-mentioned characteristics. A few such practices are mentioned below

- Jesuits in residences and parishes are offering the Spiritual Exercises in various forms to religious and laity alike. In some cases, people of other faiths have been given the Exercises. Inputs on Ignatian Spirituality are given with emphasis on integrating it into one's daily life.
- Seminars and courses are conducted to introduce people to different methods of prayer with special attention towards Eastern methods. Awareness is also being created about body-mind-spirit integration.
- Guidance and Counseling to individuals and families is another enterprise that several Jesuits are involved in. The Family Cell offers valuable service aimed at building up the quality of family life.
- The Christian Life Community (CLC) consists of committed laypersons who are guided by Ignatian Spirituality and participate in the mission of the Church. Given the historic and fruitful link that the Society has enjoyed with CLC, efforts are being made to encourage the growth of more CLC groups in our parishes.
- Celebration of the Eucharist and Sacraments is done with increased participation and with an emphasis on bringing out the inner meaning of the rituals. Many creative adaptations have been tried out in this area. Popular devotions have been adapted to include a social orientation.
- The riches of Scripture are increasingly being made available to the laity through courses that sometimes extend over a whole year.
- Laity now plays a much larger role in catechesis and other pastoral services. Some take up these works on a regular basis with a token remuneration while others freely volunteer their services. The rural areas have had a long tradition of

- lay involvement in the person of the catechist who was specially trained for the work. While such catechists continue with their dedicated services, there is a move to now have more lay volunteers take on roles formerly performed by the professional catechist.
- Committed participation is also noticed in the functioning of the Pastoral Committee and other parish associations. Another form of ‘responsible participation’ is being encouraged in the rural areas. Here the local people are required to come forward and ask for the celebration of the sacraments. They also have to take responsibility for the organization of all the details involved.
 - Inculturation is now an accepted practice in most areas although there still is some resistance to it in the cities. A lot has been done in rural areas where local customs and rituals have been successfully integrated into liturgical celebrations. Bhajans and Natak are local forms that have found extensive use in pastoral services. The use of local art, music and dialects has made the liturgy richer and more meaningful. Another form of inculturation is the Jesuit Swamis who have taken to a lifestyle based on the Indian Ashram system.
 - Many Christian communities were established before the contemporary period. The preaching of the faith was accompanied by educational and economic initiatives which helped the local people become more self-reliant. In recent years, the care of these communities has been gradually handed over to the diocesan clergy either partially or completely.
 - Concern for the environment is a modern global issue that is gradually being reflected in the celebration of sacraments and prayer services. Nature clubs are taking shape in parishes and they now take the lead in conducting conservation campaigns and celebrating international days of ecological significance.
 - Our parishes provide numerable services to the poor and marginalized. Such services include study classes, book bank, medical camps etc. In recent years, more stress has been laid on upgrading of skills, leadership training, income generating schemes and placement for suitable jobs. Pastors in rural areas now pay special attention to the empowerment of women, bonded labourers and migrant workers.

- A lot has been done in recent years in the area of inter-religious dialogue. In rural areas, Christians participate quite often in festivals and prayer services celebrated by different religions. This is slowly catching on in the cities where parishes have taken the initiative to conduct inter-faith prayer services and spread awareness about the deeper meaning of different festivals. There are specialized Institutes for the study of religion that engage in the dialogue of theological exchange. The process of dialogue received a setback when some Christian communities faced incidents of severe communal violence but steps are now on to build bridges once again.
- Recognizing the basic goodness present in other religions, we now encourage members of other faiths to find meaning within their religious tradition. Adult baptisms are still administered but not as frequently as before.
- The formation of Basic Communities (Christian and Human) is a major thrust of most dioceses and our parishes pay great attention to this area. The communities which started out as Christian groups have been opened up in some cases to include all people in a locality. These communities promote harmony in the locality and bring people together to work for common issues.

Conclusion

The list of practices mentioned above gives a picture of the rich and varied ways in which pastoral work is being carried out. Certainly there is much more that can be done and there are some areas that could be further explored. Among these are

- Greater use of information technology for retreats and guidance
- Addressing the problem of high stress levels at the workplace
- Advocacy for structural change
- Greater participation in civic life
- Building up of family life
- Relevant spirituality for youth
- Experiments in living among the people

A lacuna in the past was that many pastors did not receive specialized training for their ministry. A step in the right direction has now been taken with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeth offering an M.Th in Pastoral Theology.

The overall picture that comes across is that Jesuits in the West Zone have been dynamic and creative in their approach to today's pastoral ministry. They have sought new ways of bringing pastoral care to the people in keeping with the vision of the Church and the Society. And most importantly, pastoral work is being seen as a ministry that is both challenging and fulfilling. This has led to a renewed interest in this ministry – a ministry which is so integral to our Society's charism.

References

1. Abbot, Walter SJ (ed). *The Documents of Vatican II*. The America Press, 1966.
2. Arrupe, Pedro SJ. *Some Guidelines for the Parish Apostolate*. Acta Romana Societatis Iesu, 1979.
3. *Decrees of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1995.
4. Divarkar, Parmananda SJ (ed). *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1996.
5. *Documents of the Thirty-First General Congregation*. Anand Press, 1967.
6. *Documents of the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*. Anand Press, 1976.
7. Ganss, George SJ (trsl). *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1993.
8. Kolvenbach, Peter Hans SJ. *Challenges of Jesuit Parish Ministry*. Address at JEPASA Convention, 1997.