



# “The Audacity to Seek the Impossible”

By Tracey Primrose

We too desire to contribute to that which today seems impossible: a humanity reconciled in justice, that dwells peacefully in a well-cared-for common home, where there is a place for all, since we recognize each other as brothers and sisters, as sons and daughters of the same and only Father.

— FR. ARTURO SOSA, SJ, 31ST SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Outgoing Superior General Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ (left), embraces the newly elected Superior General, Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ.

Photos: Fr. Don Doll, SJ

In the 476-year history of the Society of Jesus, there have been 30 Superiors General of the order better known as the Jesuits. That changed on October 14 in Rome, when the 212 delegates to General Congregation 36 elected their 31st leader, Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal, SJ, the first Latin American to serve as Superior General.

The election was marked by the grace and civility that have long characterized the transfer of power in the Jesuit order. On October 3, the day after he opened the congregation, the previous Superior General, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ, appointed Fr. James Grummer, SJ, of the Wisconsin Province to serve as Vicar General until the new general was elected. The congregation then voted to accept the resignation of Fr. Nicolás and, several days later, began a centuries-old tradition called *murmuratio*. Four days of one-on-one conversation and information gathering, the *murmuratio* was established by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, who instructed his companions to use the period to “seek enlightenment from those able to give good information” about any Jesuit suitable for the office. Importantly, and in sharp contrast to every other election, campaigning and politicking is strictly forbidden.

The day of the election began with a Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit at Santo Spirito in Sassia, the 12th-century church across the street from the Jesuit Curia, headquarters of the Society of Jesus.

### FR. ARTURO SOSA, SJ

- 31st Superior General of the Jesuits and the first from Latin America
- Born November 12, 1948, in Caracas, Venezuela
- Entered the Jesuits in 1966
- Ordained a priest in 1977
- Social Apostolate Coordinator of the Venezuelan Province and head of la Fundación Centro Gumilla, a Jesuit-run social and action research center (1978–96)
- Provincial of Venezuelan Province (1996–2004)
- Rector of la Universidad Católica del Táchira (2004–14)
- Delegate of the Superior General for the International Houses and Works of the Society of Jesus in Rome (2014–16)
- Speaks Spanish, Italian, and English; understands French



Fr. Arturo Sosa, SJ (center), grants his first press conference after being elected 31st Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Fr. Patrick Mulemi, SJ, director of the Jesuits' Communication and Public Relations Office (left), and Fr. Federico Lombardi, SJ, former director of the Holy See Press Office (right), join him.

After Mass, the delegates returned to the Curia and silently assembled in the *aula*, the meeting hall that has been used for General Congregations since the Jesuits established their headquarters near the Vatican in 1927.

By noon, the name of the new general had spread around the world: Fr. Arturo Sosa, 67, a native of Venezuela. A man of deep spirituality and intelligence, Fr. Sosa most recently served as the delegate for the Jesuits' international houses in Rome. His wide range of experience also includes time as a provincial, leadership positions with the Jesuits' social apostolate in Venezuela, and experience as a university rector and professor.

The newly minted general was given little time to rest. Just four days after his election, he faced nearly 70 reporters and 12 camera crews in his first press conference. Several days later, the curia busily prepared for a visit from Pope Francis, who addressed the congregation.

After the election, the delegates turned

their attention to the work ahead: matters of mission, governance, and the state of the Society. A General Congregation is the supreme governing body of the Society of Jesus, and the delegates are aware of the historic significance of this 36th gathering. The days are long but gratifying, with at least one special perk: a private tour of the Sistine Chapel arranged by Pope Francis.

In his first Mass as general, Fr. Sosa called on the Jesuits to “think creatively about the ways in which our service to the mission of Christ Jesus can be more effective ... to think about ways of deeply understanding the unique moment of human history in which we are living and to contribute to the search for alternatives for overcoming poverty, inequality, and oppression.”

It is a tall order but one that is certain to energize and embolden the Society of Jesus for years to come. ✠

For more information, visit [www.gc36.org](http://www.gc36.org).



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