

Pope tells Jesuits to make faith clear

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI asked the Jesuits to continue to be pioneers in dialogue, theological research and work for justice, but insisted that they also must make clear their faith and their acceptance of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

"The church needs you, counts on you and continues to turn to you with trust," the pope told more than 200 Jesuits chosen to represent the almost 20,000 members of the Society of Jesus for the order's General Congregation.

Led by Spanish Father Adolfo Nicolas, elected superior general of the order Jan. 19, the congregation delegates met Feb. 21 with the pope.

Father Nicolas told the pope, "In communion with the church and guided by the magisterium, we are seeking to dedicate ourselves deeply to service, discernment and research."

The members of the General Congregation are aware of their responsibility to the church as a whole, he said, but they also are aware of the need for humility, "recognizing that the mystery of God and of the human person is much greater than our ability to understand."

The new superior told the pope that "it saddens us" when people try to present the Jesuits as a group of rebel theologians opposed to traditional church teaching or to the hierarchy.

"The inevitable insufficiencies and superficialities of some of us," he said, "frequently are only manifestations of human limits and imperfections or of the inevitable tensions of daily life."

The Jesuits, he said, love and serve the church, including the hierarchy and the pope himself.

Pope Benedict told the Jesuits that the rapidly changing world with its technological

advances and its wars, its aspirations for peace and its threats to the environment, the new possibilities it offers for dialogue and its new forms of poverty call for a response of hope and of salvation from the church.

While 450 years ago the Jesuits were sent to far-off lands to preach the Gospel, “today new peoples do not know the Lord or know him poorly” and are far from the church culturally more than geographically, the pope said.

“The obstacles that challenge those who proclaim the Gospel are not seas or great distances,” but rather new barriers that modern societies and cultures have placed between “faith and human knowledge, faith and modern science, faith and the commitment to justice,” he said.

Pope Benedict encouraged the Jesuits to continue ensuring a high level of intellectual, cultural and spiritual preparation of their members so that they could cross the barriers and demonstrate how faith not only is not opposed to knowledge, science and justice, but rather is the ingredient that enables them to respond to the deepest desires of the human heart.

Reminding the Jesuits of the letter he sent them before they elected Father Nicolas, Pope Benedict said the Jesuits must continue their theological work on themes related to sexuality and to other religions, but they must do so in a way that helps people understand church teaching on the topics.

“The themes of the salvation of all people in Christ, of sexual morality, of marriage and the family - continually discussed and questioned today - must be deepened and enlightened in the context of contemporary reality, but maintaining the harmony with the magisterium that will avoid provoking confusion and concern among the people of God,” he told them.

Pope Benedict also objected to the idea some Jesuits have that the order’s special fourth vow of obedience to the pope is limited to obeying him when he asks an individual Jesuit or the entire order to undertake a specific mission.

The pope said the “fuller meaning” of the vow, according to the thought of Jesuit founder St. Ignatius of Loyola, is “to love and serve the vicar of Christ on earth with

that 'effective and affective' devotion that makes you his precious and irreplaceable collaborators in his service of the universal church."

While the members of the Jesuit General Congregation continue to meet and discuss possible documents to guide the order in the immediate future, they also finalized the membership of the order's central government.

Father James Grummer, a member of the Jesuits' Wisconsin province, was reappointed regional assistant for North America as well as being named one of Father Nicolas' four special assistants. Another of the special assistants is Father Federico Lombardi who will assist Father Nicolas while continuing in his posts as director of the Vatican press office, of Vatican Radio and of the Vatican television center.