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HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
Vatican City

Rome, 15 January 2008

Most Holy Father,

The General Congregation has received with profound attention and gratitude the message that His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, has addressed to the Superior General and -- through him-- to the whole Society of Jesus during this meaningful and important moment in the life of our Order.

The Holy Father has manifested once again the affection, spiritual closeness, esteem and gratitude with which the Successors of Peter have regarded and see the Society of Jesus, continuing to expect the faithful service of the Society for the integral and clear proclamation of the Gospel in our time. While the Holy Father confirms that the intimate union with Christ should be the secret of our apostolic and missionary life, he recalls the original charism of the Society of Jesus as defined in the Formula of the Institute: "to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross...and to serve the Lord alone and the church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth".

In continuity with the interventions of His predecessors -- in particular Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, on the occasion of the previous General Congregations -- and with his other previous interventions, the Holy Father recalls the particular bond that binds the Society of Jesus to the Successor of Peter, as expressed in the "fourth vow" of special obedience to the Pope. The Holy Father underlines "the formative responsibility of the Society in the fields of theology, spirituality and mission", asking "that the Congregation reaffirms, in the spirit of Saint Ignatius, its own total adhesion to catholic doctrine, in particular on the crucial points under attack today from secular culture", examples of which he mentions explicitly.

The Society of Jesus affirms its own desire to respond sincerely to the call and demands of the Holy Father. The General Congregation will give them full attention in the course of its labors, a considerable part of which will be dedicated exactly on the topics of the identity and mission of the Jesuits, and on religious and apostolic obedience, in particular obedience to the Holy Father.

The Congregation has set out to face its tasks with confidence and serenity, knowing that it can count on the affection and prayer of the Holy Father and his deep understanding of the difficult challenge "to announce the Gospel in the various social and cultural contexts, being confronted with different mentalities", as the mission the Society of Jesus demands today for the service of the Church.

With profound gratitude,

devotedly yours in the Lord,

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.