

Accompanying Lay Collaborators in Their Vocational Journey

01/08/2025 4:50 am EST

Collaboration as a Constitutive Dimension

The depth and authenticity of the Society of Jesus' mission today depends significantly on how well Jesuits and lay leaders accompany collaborators in discovering and deepening their unique vocational calls within the Ignatian charism. This accompaniment work has become increasingly vital as the Society recognizes that collaboration is not merely a practical necessity but a constitutive dimension of how the mission unfolds in today's Church.



Starting from Experience

At its core, accompanying lay collaborators requires recognizing that vocation emerges from lived experience rather than abstract theory. For Ignatian institutions, this means creating spaces where collaborators can reflect on their experience through the lens of Ignatian spirituality and discernment. Regular opportunities for prayer, reflection, and spiritual conversation help collaborators connect their daily work to deeper questions of meaning and God's call in their lives.

Thresholds in the Journey

The vocational journey typically progresses through distinct thresholds that require different types of accompaniment. In early stages, the focus is on helping collaborators move from seeing their work merely as employment to experiencing it as participation in the *Missio Dei*. As their commitment deepens, accompaniment shifts toward helping them discover their unique way of living out the Ignatian charism while honoring their distinct lay vocation.



Formation that Honors Adult Learning

Formation plays an essential role but must be adapted to how adults actually learn and grow. Effective accompaniment involves creating opportunities for collaborators to connect Ignatian spirituality with their lived reality through mentoring relationships, peer groups, and guided reflection. The goal is not to make lay collaborators into pseudo-Jesuits, but rather to help them discover how the Ignatian charism can be authentically expressed through their lay state of life.

Partners in Mission

As General Congregation 35 affirmed, "We are humbled and grateful that so many, inspired as we have been by the vocation of Ignatius and the tradition of the Society, have chosen both to work with us and to share our sense of mission." Good accompaniment helps collaborators identify their particular gifts and calling within this shared mission while fostering what GC 36 called "partnership in mission."



Friends in the Lord

Critical to this process is developing genuine friendships in the Lord between Jesuits and lay collaborators. This requires moving beyond hierarchical relationships to walk together as companions sharing a common spiritual heritage and mission commitment. The image of fire - of sparks being fanned into flame - aptly describes how vocational accompaniment helps kindle and spread the Ignatian charism through different life paths and expressions.

A Gradual Journey

The journey of vocational deepening is gradual and requires patience. Experience has shown that effective accompaniment often spans many years, allowing time for organic growth in understanding and commitment. The focus should be on nurturing the "spark" of vocation that already exists within collaborators rather than trying to force specific outcomes.

Success in this accompaniment ultimately serves not just individual vocational development but the vitality of the Jesuit mission itself. When lay collaborators are helped to discover and embrace their authentic vocational calling, they become true co-carriers of the Ignatian charism, ensuring its creative continuity into the future.
