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Society of Jesus members pleased, surprised by election of Jesuit pope

Dennis Coday | Mar. 14, 2013
Pope Francis

The election of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to be pope "opens for the church a path full of hope ... at this crucial time," said the Jesuit superior general in a statement released Thursday in Rome.

At this time, all Jesuits should remember the special vow of obedience they make to the pope and renew their commitment to make themselves available "to be sent into the vineyard of the Lord," said the statement from Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, the Jesuit superior general.

"The distinguishing mark of our Society is that it is ... a companionship ... bound to the Roman Pontiff by a special bond of love and service," the statement said, quoting from the order's constitution.

The statement also praised Bergoglio's choosing the name Francis. The choice shows his "evangelical spirit of closeness to the poor, his identification with simple people, and his commitment to the renewal of the Church," the statement said.

Bergoglio is a member of the Society of Jesus, the religious order founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in 1534. He was head of the order in Argentina in the 1970s.

Despite official praise from the Jesuit superior, individual Jesuits expressed surprise.

The Vatican spokesperson, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, told reporters: "Personally, I'm a bit shocked to have a Jesuit pope. Jesuits think of themselves as servants, not authorities in church."

"Jesuits resist being named bishop or cardinal. To be named pope -- wow," Lombardi said. "Must have been result of strong call."

Jesuit Fr. Gerard Stockhausen, executive secretary of the Jesuit Conference USA, told Catholic News Service that even those Jesuits who do become cardinals "tend not to move in 'cardinal circles,' where they get to know each other. That's not our world."

In Dajabón, Dominican Republic, Jesuit Fr. Regino Martinez called it "a moment of great hope and opportunity for the church."

He said Pope Francis as the first Latin American pope also offers "an opportunity to support the work being done in the Latin American church and a show of support for Latin Americans."

[Dennis Coday is *NCR* editor, reporting from Rome. Patricia Zapor, Cindy Wooden and Ezra Fieser of the Catholic News Service contributed to this story.]

STATEMENT OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

In the name of the Society of Jesus, I give thanks to God for the election of our new Pope, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., which opens for the Church a path full of hope.

All of us Jesuits accompany with our prayers our brother and we thank him for his generosity in accepting the responsibility of guiding the Church at this crucial time. The name of "Francis" by which we shall now know him evokes for us the Holy Father's evangelical spirit of closeness to the poor, his identification with simple people, and his commitment to the renewal of the Church. From the very first moment in which he appeared before the people of God, he gave visible witness to his simplicity, his humility, his pastoral experience and his spiritual depth.

"The distinguishing mark of our Society is that it is ... a companionship ... bound to the Roman Pontiff by a special bond of love and service." (*Complementary Norms*, No. 2, § 2) Thus, we share the joy of the whole Church, and at the same time, wish to express our renewed availability to be sent into the vineyard of the Lord, according to the spirit of our special vow of obedience, that so distinctively unites us with the Holy Father (*General Congregation* 35, Decree 1, No. 17).

P. Adolfo Nicolás S.J.

Superior General

Rome, 14 March 2013

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