

**The scene from Rome: *Four questions with José Mesa, S.J.***

José Mesa, S.J., a visiting professor in Loyola's School of Education, is in Rome to take part in the Jesuits' 36th General Congregation. Here, he talks about the election process, the atmosphere in the Italian capital, and how he believes the new Superior General—Father Arturo Sosa Abascal, S.J.—will lead the Society of Jesus.

**What made the new Superior General stand out from the other Jesuits who were considered for the position?**

The process of an election of a new Superior General is really very different from any other democratic process or election. There are no candidates or campaigns. Instead we have a period of *murmuratio* that is actually a process of discernment (looking for God's will) in which electors have the chance to talk to each other about the kind of leadership needed for the Society of Jesus and possible candidates. This is done in private one-on-one conversations. Campaigns or public conversations are strictly forbidden; members of the congregation can only answer the questions they are asked—volunteering information is prohibited. After four days of *murmuratio*, the electors gather for the election.

Electors clearly saw that Father Sosa brings a broad and a particular experience of being Jesuit in a region of the world in which faith and social justice have been at the center of the Church concerns and debates. "A faith that does justice" summarizes well the mission of the Jesuits today, and Father Sosa has a broad experience in this area as a Jesuit working in social ministries in his native Venezuela. But Father Sosa is also an intellectual with a doctorate in political science and has extensive experience in education as a university professor, researcher, and president of the Catholic University of Táchira in Venezuela.

Father Sosa combines these apostolic experiences with years of government in the Society of Jesus at the local and international level. He was provincial of Venezuela and was, before being elected Superior General, Father General's delegate for the Interprovincial Houses in

Rome. That position allowed him to interact with Jesuits from all over the world and with officials at the Vatican as the Society's contact person for such important institutions as the Gregorian University, the Biblical Institute, the Oriental Institute—all institutions that play a central role in the Church. Even more important, Father Sosa mixes all this experience with a personality that is warm, friendly, and welcoming.

**What are you hoping he'll do for the Society of Jesus in general? And for Jesuit education in particular?**

Father Sosa will lead the Society, very much, in Pope Francis's style, making sure that the voice and the concerns of the marginalized are central to everything we do. At the same time, he maintains a pastoral approach (people first) that he has demonstrated when exercising authority in the Society.

Father Sosa is also somebody who has first-hand experience with Jesuit education. He studied his primary and secondary education in the *Colegio San Ignacio de Loyola* in Caracas, so he is in many ways a product of Jesuit education. Besides, as I pointed out before, he has extensive experience at the Jesuit university level, not only in his native Venezuela but also as a visiting professor at Georgetown University.

I have no doubt Father Sosa knows the apostolic potential of Jesuit education, and he will challenge Jesuit education to develop it further in collaboration with other sectors and institutions run by the Society and others. I think it will be an exciting time for renewal, networking, and creativity, and to explore “the audacity of the improbable and even the impossible” as Father Sosa stated in his first homily as Superior General of the Society.

**How would you describe your time in Rome and the atmosphere around electing a new Superior General?**

This has been really a time of grace, friendship, and amazing companionship among all members of the congregation. I am a non-

elector member of the congregation, so I did not vote for the new Superior General. But I participated in the *murmuratio* and saw how it was really a time of discernment in which electors worked hard and respectfully to find the person God wanted as a Superior General.

**Anything else you'd like to say about the new leader or the General Congregation?**

It is clear for all of us here, that the challenges facing the Society of Jesus and the world are immense and even overwhelming. But at the same time, there is a profound faith and trust that God is guiding us and that only God's grace can bring "the audacity of the improbable and even the impossible" so needed in our world today.