

# Ignatian Mission - One Who is Sent

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Today in Catholic institutions such as schools and hospitals we often use the expression “mission and ministry.” If ministry refers more to helping in whatever way, then mission points to the big picture, the more long-range goal, the continuity of effort. The root of mission is the Latin word *mitto*, which means “I send.” To be on mission is “to be sent.”

In our Christian context, one does not give oneself a mission. Mission comes from another. We know that Jesus in the Gospel of St. John refers to himself as “the one who is sent.” He has no words, no deeds of his own; what he says and what he does are always at the behest of God the Father. When the Gospel records that he called his disciples together and selected twelve, he gave them the name apostles. Again, the word apostle, from Greek, indicates “one who is sent.”

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In the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius took up the notion of the mission of the Jesuits in a chapter entitled “The Distribution of the incorporated Members in Christ’s Vineyard and Their Relations There with Their Neighbor.” The vineyard image includes the owner taking the initiative to seek out

workers for his vineyard. The owner makes his search for workers a number of times from dawn to late afternoon. Jesus emphasizes the owner and his call to work in the parable, just as God always is the one who calls us to our mission. Though God is always the origin of divine mission, our personal mission in life is ordinarily mediated through other human beings.

For Jesuits, the vow of obedience is particularly focused in terms of missioning. In order for a Jesuit to be missioned, there is always the process of discernment on the part of the individual and the proper exercise of the vow of obedience. Both discernment and obedience demand a listening. As we listen to God, we become aware of inclinations, leanings, attractions, pulls or pushes that appear to come from deep within us. We often cannot explain why we feel so drawn, only that we cannot deny it. So in Christian life just as in religious life, the first source of a missioning is from God, and missioning, just like ministry, demands that we be people who pray, that is, be attuned to God. Though missioning comes concretely from a superior in religious life, for most Christians it comes from another person or special group – from a spouse, from a spiritual director, from a friend, from a prayer group, or from some kind of small community sharing.

A recent document of the Christian Life Community describes mission as “focused passion.” What a mission in

life gives us is an excitement, an enthusiasm, an élan. This stems from and at the same time is centered on the mission we have. When Jesus says “I have come to light a fire on the earth – how I wish the blaze were ignited!” he is speaking with a focused passion; he is speaking of his mission. Dedication, a focused passion, then, is a necessary ingredient of mission.

How do we relate having a mission and being a missionary? St. Francis Xavier, early companion and close friend of Ignatius Loyola, is the symbol of being a missionary. Today we acknowledge that the word missionary cannot be restricted only to those sent to evangelize in countries or cultures not their own. Mission cannot be defined by geography, especially in our globalized world. Mission is not driven just by zeal to expand the boundaries of the Church – grateful as we are to the Xaviers and Cabrinis of the past and present. To be missionary, however, does call us all to step out beyond the boundaries of our fears and our traditions and our cultures.

In the imagery of the vineyard, Ignatius draws upon Jesus’ parable to indicate how Jesus has extended his mission to us all, who are missionary in our very baptismal being. Just as Jesus describes himself as “the one who is sent,” so through the call of God the Father he sends us to proclaim the reign of God close around us, and to make people aware of the nearness of a saving, loving God. Whatever form or shape our personal mission takes, we realize that our mission today must be exercised in the way we live and deal with others. Jesus images for us the way that God respects and dialogues with us. Only with such dialogue and respect can we make ourselves one with God’s mission.

Mission and ministry, integral to our being Christian, are also essential aspects of Ignatian spirituality. Mission and ministry involve not just our hearts, but are the total response of our being. Not only do we believe in what we are about, but we also have passion about it, a focused passion, and so we find ourselves “on mission.” By living our Ignatian spirituality we are missionaries who delight in just being a helper.

As a help for our reflection and prayer, we can read the passage from Matthew 28:1-10 where the women on Easter morning are given a mission and a ministry twice over – from an angel and from Jesus. We might also find helpful the passage from John 20:11-18, where Mary Magdalene earns the title of first apostle – the one on mission from Jesus with a ministry to his disciples.

## *Mission and ministry*

**The Ignatian vocation of being a helper,  
by God’s invitation  
and by others’ direction and support,  
sent to our brothers and sisters.**