The Jesuit Charism

Most Religious Orders have a unique orientation that distinguishes them from other Orders. This is often referred to as the “Charism” of the Order.

There is a Jesuit Charism too, one that distinguishes the Jesuits from other men’s Religious Orders. This Charism manifests itself in the way Jesuits live and what they do. It is mirrored in what Jesuits value, the choices they make personally and in community, and in the minor and major decisions they make regarding ministries and lifestyle . . . what Jesuits refer to as “Our Way of Proceeding.”

The foundation of the Jesuit Charism is the “Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.” A number of attempts have been made in recent years to gather up certain principles that shine through the writings of St. Ignatius and are envisaged as permanent features of the Society he founded. Any such list presupposes, of course, the common elements of all religious orders in the Catholic Church, including the faithful observance of the usual vows of religion: poverty, chastity and obedience.

The following 10 features may serve as a summary of what is more specific to the spirit of St. Ignatius.

1. **Dedication to the “Greater” glory of God.** This gives the Jesuit a kind of holy restlessness, a ceaseless effort to do better, to achieve the more or, in Latin, the *Magis*. Ignatius may be said to have been a God-intoxicated man in the sense that he made “the greater glory of God” the supreme norm of every action, great or small.
2. **A Personal love for Jesus Christ and a desire to be counted among his close companions.** Repeatedly in the Exercises, Jesuits pray to know Christ more clearly, to love him more dearly and to follow him more nearly.

3. **To labor with, in, and for the Church,** and to think at all times “with the Church.”

4. **Apostolic Availability.** To be at the disposal of the Church, available to labor in any place, for the sake of the greater and more universal good.

5. **Union of hearts and minds.** Jesuits are to see themselves as “Friends in the Lord” and as parts of a body bound together by a communion of minds and hearts.

6. **Preference for spiritual ministries.** In the choice of ministries, Ignatius writes, “spiritual goods ought to be preferred to bodily,” since they are more conducive to the “ultimate and supernatural end.”

7. **Discernment.** Ignatius distinguished carefully between ends and means, choosing the means best suited to achieve the end in view. He teaches the discipline of indifference in the sense of detachment from anything that is not to be sought for its own sake.

8. **Adaptability.** Ignatius always paid close attention to the times, places and persons with which he was dealing. He took care to frame general laws in such a way as to allow for flexibility in application.

9. **Respect for human and natural capacities.** Although Ignatius relied primarily on spiritual means, such as divine grace, prayer and sacramental ministry, he took account of natural abilities, learning, culture and manners as gifts to be used for the service and glory of God. For this reason he showed a keen interest in education.
10. A synthesis of the active and the contemplative life. According to Jerome Nadal (1507-80), who spoke of the Jesuit practice, it is a special grace of the whole Society to be contemplative not only in moments of withdrawal but also in the midst of action, thus “seeking God in all things.”