

## **The 29<sup>th</sup> Superior General**

Perhaps Father Kolvenbach's most lasting legacy will be his ability to ease the tensions that had arisen between the papacy and the Jesuits during the generalate of his predecessor. Pope John Paul II had widely known concerns over the direction of the Jesuits under Father Arrupe. They had attempted to come to agreements in early 1981, but two events stalled those discussions. On May 13, 1981, John Paul II was shot in St. Peter's Square. Only three months later, on August 7, Father Arrupe suffered a debilitating stroke that prevented him from continuing as Superior General.

In his nearly 25 years at the helm of the Jesuits, Father Kolvenbach was the classic peacemaker between the papacy and the society. Having entered in the context of John Paul's suspicions concerning the order, Father Kolvenbach made his and his confreres' loyalty evident from the very beginning.

In a letter Father Kolvenbach addressed to the entire society on the day after he was elected Superior General, he wrote:

The Lord wishes to make use of our Society to announce to the men and women of today's world—with a pastoral preference for those who suffer injustices in this world—the Good News of the Kingdom in a way that speaks to their culture and condition of life. He wants us in this way to serve His Church and the Vicar of Christ, Pope John Paul II.

With one stroke of the pen, Father Kolvenbach was able to assure both his Jesuit brethren and the pope of his simultaneous fraternity and loyalty. This was instrumental in the good relations Father Kolvenbach enjoyed with John Paul and his successor, Pope Benedict XVI.