



Office of the Vice President for Mission

TO: The Gonzaga Community
FROM: Frank E. Case, S.J. and Shanea Giroux
SUBJ: Moment for Mission
DATE: February 11, 2014

Jesuit and Ignatian Heritage

In the current draft of the Gonzaga University Strategic Plan, circulating within the University at this time, some have wondered about the phrase “Jesuit and Ignatian heritage” that appears in the second paragraph of the Preamble. Isn’t this repetitive? Often the two terms are used *interchangeably*, but in fact there is a distinction.

The term “Ignatian” refers largely, but not exclusively, to the spirituality of St. Ignatius that he formulated in his little book, *The Spiritual Exercises*. Shortly after his conversion from the life of a courtier to a devoted follower of Christ, Ignatius spent a year in prayer at the town of Manresa in northern Spain. It was a year of deeply prayerful reflection on what God was calling him to do with his life. He was beset by many “demons” during this time, and had to learn to sort out the movements of the Spirit of God from those originating from the evil spirit. This gave rise to his rules for discernment of spirits. At one point during this year he was sitting on the banks of the Cardoner River steeped in reflection and received what he called a life-changing insight. Some experts believe he saw all of creation issuing forth from God and eventually moving under the Spirit’s power back to its ultimate fulfillment in God. This would lead to the phrase, “finding God in all things”. Even though Ignatius himself used the phrase only rarely, the idea permeates the final contemplation in the *Exercises*.

It is important to note that Ignatius was a layman when he went through this experience leading to the formulation of his *Spiritual Exercises*. These exercises and Ignatian spirituality are not restricted to Jesuits, in other words; it is a spirituality for everyone; it belongs to the church and to the world. Many people of a variety of faith traditions have prayed the *Exercises* with great fruit.

While the *Exercises* are not the exclusive “property” of the Jesuits, we nonetheless cut our Jesuit baby teeth on them in the novitiate, and we continue to pray in the spirit of the *Exercises* in our annual retreats. The *Exercises* have made a deep imprint on our Jesuit

identity. One of our characteristics, as enunciated in the 34th General Congregation, is “a deep personal love for Jesus Christ”. This love binds us together and impels us forth on mission to serve.

So we Jesuits are deeply Ignatian in our spirituality, but the term “Jesuit” carries a further meaning. As Ignatius and his early companions were impelled towards lives of service to their fellow humans – all for the greater glory of God – Ignatius was “commissioned” to formulate our way of doing all this in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, which he formulated over his 16 years as the Society’s first Superior General. We like to say that the *Constitutions* prescribe “our way of proceeding”. Through succeeding generations the Society has come together in General Congregations to discern how we should live and adapt this way of proceeding to various cultures and in emerging historical settings. Recent General Congregations have given rise to several formulations of “our mission today”. These mission decrees are available on the Mission Office’s website under “library”.

In conclusion, the term “Ignatian” has a broader application than the term “Jesuit”. The latter applies to how the Society of Jesus has lived out its Ignatian heritage in service of the church and humanity, AMDG.