

# STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

SPIRITUAL CARE FOR THE POOR:  
AN IGNATIAN RESPONSE TO  
POPE FRANCIS'S CHALLENGE

TED PENTON, S.J.

50/2 SUMMER 2018

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*STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* is a publication of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is composed of Jesuits appointed from their provinces. The seminar identifies and studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially US and Canadian Jesuits, and gathers current scholarly studies pertaining to the history and ministries of Jesuits throughout the world. It then disseminates the results through this journal.

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**TED PENTON, SJ**

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**50/2 • SUMMER 2018**

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## *a word from the editor. . .*

*"A poor man hears the rumbling in his own stomach before he hears the voice of God."*

Twenty-five years ago, when I was in philosophy studies, I remember a Jesuit claiming that St. Ignatius had said this. So I did some digging. I found the quotation neither in print nor on the internet, so if Jesuits were indeed circulating it at some point, it did not gain any traction. But one classic book on Jesuit life—one of my favorites—does seem to imply that Ignatius had said something along these lines.

Whatever the truth, there are several reasons why this quotation is thought-provoking. First, it expresses the perennial question among Jesuits as to whether they should prioritize the spiritual or the material needs of the poor—a flashpoint for conversations about Jesuit identity and apostolates ever since GC 32 declared that “the mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”<sup>1</sup>

Second, the quotation can prompt the opposite claim that the wealthy and satisfied find it more difficult than do the poor to hear and respond to the voice of God—a recurring theme of the Israelite prophets and psalmists, and of Jesus himself, notably in the Lucan “woes” and in the parable of Lazarus and Dives.<sup>2</sup>

Third, the quotation is rather ironic, considering that Ignatius suffered excruciating pain from gallstones for the last thirty years of his life. If any stomach were going to hinder a person from hearing the voice of God, it would have been Ignatius’s!

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<sup>1</sup> GC 32, d. 4, no. 2; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 2009), 298.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 6:24–26; 16:19–31.

In the present issue of *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*, Mr. Ted Penton provides a beautiful account of the harvest that can come from offering spiritual care to the poor. To be honest, Mr. Penton also made me squirm by casting a light on my own unexamined prejudice—namely, to think that efforts to provide spiritual retreats are probably best spent on others who are (supposedly) in a better position to benefit from them.

Of course, Mr. Penton's essay does not and cannot resolve the tensions surrounding apostolic priorities for the Society of Jesus. As long as Jesuits find themselves with limited resources—that is, as long as they remain bound by space and time—they will have to make hard choices. Ignatius himself conceded the impossibility of giving the full *Spiritual Exercises* to everyone, given that "there is not sufficient time to do everything."<sup>3</sup> But the many testimonies contained in these pages suggest that the question of where to focus such apostolic efforts is not as easily answered as one might suppose.

*Barton T. Geger, SJ*  
*General Editor*

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<sup>3</sup> *Spiritual Exercises* 18; *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. George E. Ganss, SJ (St. Louis: IJS, 1992), 27.

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**Ted Penton (CDA)** first met the Jesuits through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, where he worked for the Farmworker Unit of Legal Aid of North Carolina. From JVC he went on to complete a JD at Harvard Law School. After a brief career with the Department of Justice in Ottawa, he entered the English Canada Province in 2009. He spent his regency working for the Ignatian Spirituality Project and recently finished his theology studies (M.Div., STB, STM) at Regis College in Toronto.

# Spiritual Care for the Poor: An Ignatian Response to Pope Francis's Challenge

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*The Ignatian Spirituality Project offers a compelling response to Pope Francis's call to offer spiritual accompaniment to the poor. Drawing on the traditions of Ignatian spirituality and Twelve-Step programs, ISP retreats provide an ecumenically-sensitive place for genuine encounter, healing, and growth. Participants begin to overcome deeply-rooted shame and to see themselves as loved by God. This encounter transforms retreatants and facilitators both, in accordance with Francis's call both to serve, and to be evangelized by, the poor.*

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## 1. The Challenge

Care for the poor has always been a hallmark of Christianity. In Canada and the United States (the focus of this article), many parishes and other Catholic institutions have long done wonderful work in offering support to this population—for instance, running food and clothing banks, serving hot meals, sponsoring refugee families, and even turning parish halls into temporary shelters. Pope Francis has made care for the poor a prominent theme of his pontificate. In addition to the innumerable occasions on which he has spoken out on the issue, he has led by example. In the Vatican, he has opened a medical clinic, shower stalls, and a barber shop for those in need,<sup>1</sup> and he even

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<sup>1</sup> Inés San Martín, "Pope Francis Opens a Medical clinic for the Homeless at the Vatican," *Crux*, February 29, 2016, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://cruxnow.com/church/2016/02/29/pope-francis-opens-a-medical-clinic-for-the-homeless-at-the-vatican>.

celebrated his own eightieth birthday with guests who were experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup>

Yet despite all the excellent work done attending to the *material* needs of the poor, the contemporary church faces a considerable challenge attending to their *spiritual* needs. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis calls the church to a renewed mission of evangelization, born of a personal encounter with God's love. In the fourth chapter, "The Social Dimension of Evangelization," he calls all the faithful both to greater solidarity with the poor, and to work to eliminate the structural causes of poverty. He notes that addressing poverty requires more than simply providing material resources to those in need; it requires working to enable their full participation and inclusion in society.<sup>3</sup> With respect to spiritual care, Francis is clear that the church ought to be doing more. He states, "with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care."<sup>4</sup>

Francis's words notwithstanding, it may seem at first blush that nothing special is needed in this regard. After all, no money is charged to attend Mass or to receive the sacraments. Surely, any Catholic pastor will say that the poor are just as welcome in his church as anyone else. But this response is too easy, for at least two reasons. First, it neglects the many subtler ways in which the poor—and in this essay I mean primarily those experiencing homelessness—are generally made to feel unwelcome in North American society. Imagine, dear reader, that you yourself are experiencing homelessness. Leaving a shelter early in the morning, because you cannot stay there past seven in the morning, with all your belongings on your person, you cannot help but feel looked down upon and judged by passers-by. If you can muster change for a coffee, you will be allowed to stay at the McDonald's for up to thirty minutes; but even there, it is evident from the glances of those around

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<sup>2</sup> Gerard O'Connell, "Pope Francis Celebrates 80th Birthday with the Homeless," *America: The Jesuit Review*, December 17, 2016, accessed January 16, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2016/12/17/pope-francis-celebrates-80th-birthday-homeless>.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) 187 (hereafter cited in text as EG), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

<sup>4</sup> EG 200.

you that people do not want to sit near you, and frankly would prefer that you simply were not there. You will probably be treated to similar glances and murmurs should you go into a church during the brief time each day that the doors are unlocked. If you are quiet and do not disturb anyone, it is unlikely that anyone will ask you to leave; but you can tell from their faces that they would prefer that you did.

Second, Catholic parishes are primarily oriented toward the needs of practicing Catholics, who attend Mass and receive the sacraments regularly. This is not a criticism—it would be surprising if it were otherwise. But there is a (very) large number of people seeking a closer connection with God who do not see the Catholic sacraments as a way of achieving this. Perhaps they were not raised in the church; or perhaps they were, but had a bad experience that turned them away from it. Perhaps they see the rituals that take place there as bizarre, or dull, or just not connecting with their lives in any way. Or perhaps they simply do not feel welcome there. Many of the poor fall into these categories—searching for a stronger spiritual connection, but not having a strong connection with the institutional church.

Outreach has always been a significant part of the church's mission, and the larger question is how to reach effectively those people who are not coming in the doors of the churches. This question has a particular urgency with respect to the poor. As Francis writes:

The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care.<sup>5</sup>

Francis calls on the church, then, not simply to be *available* to the poor, should they ever come seeking spiritual care, but to make special efforts to *reach out* to them.

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<sup>5</sup> EG 200.

Within the Catholic Church, Jesuits can play an important role in this regard. The gift of Ignatian spirituality has long been a means for Catholics—and, increasingly, other Christians—to deepen their relationship with God, to see more clearly where God is at work in their lives, to discern where God is now calling them. As Ignatian retreats and spiritual direction typically take place outside the normal strictures

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*Some people wonder whether there is any point in attending to people's spiritual needs when their more basic material needs are not yet being reliably met.*

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of church buildings and sacramental celebrations, Ignatian spirituality offers a powerful way to reach out to those who may be distant from the institutional church. The Ignatian way of proceeding is to encounter all people at the specific place where they are on their own

spiritual journeys, and not to assume either that the spiritual director knows where they have been, or where God is calling them to go. The beginning assumption is not that, to get (back) on the right track, this person needs to become a Catholic or to start attending Mass regularly; but that in some form or another, the grace of the Holy Spirit is already active within his or her heart. The role of an Ignatian spiritual director is to help people discover where that grace is present in their own lives, and to discern where it is now leading them, confident that it is there already and directing them to deeper grace.

Jesuits have a rich history of making Ignatian spirituality available to a wide range of people in many different settings. The eighteenth annotation of the *Spiritual Exercises* specifically recommends adaptation to the needs of the person in question, including those “who have little natural ability or are illiterate.”<sup>6</sup> From the earliest days of the Society of Jesus, Jesuits saw the Exercises, especially eighteenth-annotation adaptations and elements of the first week, as “an extraordinarily pliable instrument that could be accommodated to a great variety of circum-

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<sup>6</sup> *Spiritual Exercises* 18, hereafter abbreviated *SpEx*; *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), 8. Unless otherwise noted, all citations of the *Exercises* refer to this edition.



stances and individuals.”<sup>7</sup> Ignatius’s secretary, Juan Alfonso de Polanco, insisted that, far from being a tool primarily for religious or those contemplating religious life, “the *Exercises* were intended for every class of society . . . [and] helped different people with different needs . . . in ways that preaching, exhortation, and fear of damnation did not.”<sup>8</sup> Among the diverse groups of people to whom sixteenth-century Jesuits gave some adapted form of the *Exercises* one can count “orphan boys in Messina,” young women in Bologna and Chieti, and many students in Jesuit schools.<sup>9</sup>

The long Jesuit tradition of adapting the *Exercises* to the needs of diverse groups continues in force today. Just to name a few adaptations found across North America, Kairos retreats are offered to high school students, and, like the retreats discussed at length in this essay, they feature considerable personal sharing in a small-group setting. Charis Ministries and Contemplative Leaders in Action reach out to young professionals. Christian Life Communities allow groups of lay people to continue living together the graces of the *Spiritual Exercises* over a long period of time.

But it is still rare to see someone experiencing homelessness walk through the doors of a Jesuit retreat house: this group has traditionally been neglected by our spiritual ministries.<sup>10</sup> Some people wonder whether there is any point in attending to people’s spiritual needs when their more basic material needs are not yet being reliably met. How could a person benefit from a retreat, from a time away with the Lord, when he or she does not even have a home, job, or family to get away from? It may seem that someone struggling simply to find a regular place to stay would have no energy available for more “secondary” concerns such as spirituality.

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<sup>7</sup> John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>8</sup> O’Malley, 130.

<sup>9</sup> O’Malley, 128–30.

<sup>10</sup> A notable exception being the Ignatian Spirituality Project, which I discuss in the remainder of this essay.

Such a mental image, however, can prevent one from seeing the spiritual life—often very vibrant—of those in difficult material circumstances. Many people living on the margins rely heavily on their relationship with God just to get them through the day. If anything, many people might find that their connection with God becomes *more* important, *more* deeply felt, the more that they have no one else on whom they can rely. When God is the only thing standing in the way of relapse, total isolation, or a complete breakdown, prayer can develop a biblical intensity that it does not have for most people accustomed to middle class comforts, such as settling down to evening prayer and an after-dinner drink. What is often lacking for those experiencing homelessness, however, is a suitable setting in which to nurture and develop this spirituality.

Francis is clear that spiritual outreach to the poor is not simply for their sake, so that *we*—who, in our minds at least, are both materially and spiritually wealthy—can assist *them*—whom we believe to be lacking in both material and spiritual terms.<sup>11</sup> It is not something that Francis encourages simply as a way of expressing our own virtues of charity and generosity to benefit others; rather, *we* have much to learn. Francis expresses this clearly:

This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.<sup>12</sup>

As practicing Catholics, comfortable in our faith, it may feel as if we have little need of being evangelized ourselves, let alone by those who seem to have so little. But if we are to take the Pope's words seriously, *we* have much to learn.

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<sup>11</sup> I use italics here to problematize the endemic use of *us* and *them* language in the context of the service of the poor. As will become apparent, the approach of the Ignatian Spirituality Project is to undermine this supposed duality by treating all participants on retreat as equals.

<sup>12</sup> EG 198.

Jesuits have a specific obligation to be present to those on the margins. From the very beginning of the Society, working with the needy was “an integral part of [Jesuits’] ministry . . . [and] intrinsic to their pastoral self-understanding.”<sup>13</sup> The *Formula of the Institute* includes service to those in prisons and hospitals, and “other works of charity” among the fundamental works of the Society.<sup>14</sup> Ignatius and the early companions ministered to the sick and prisoners, and founded institutions to serve prostitutes and orphans.<sup>15</sup> Due to its importance for the individual Jesuit, ministry to the poor was not reserved only to a select group. In his instructions to the Jesuit theologians participating in the Council of Trent, Ignatius asked each one to take time, twice a week, to “visit the hospitals [. . . and] hear the confessions of the poor and console them, even bringing them something if [he] could.”<sup>16</sup>

Recent General Congregations have confirmed the centrality of solidarity with the marginalized to the Jesuit way of proceeding. Jesuit ministry “is particularly directed towards . . . those who are at the margins of the Church or of society, those who have been denied their dignity, those who are voiceless and powerless.”<sup>17</sup> In addressing the vow of poverty that all Jesuits take, the same Congregation renewed the “pressing recommendation” of previous congregations for “*direct personal experience*” with the poor, noting that “we can break out of our habitual way of living and thinking only through physical and emotional proximity to the way of living and thinking of the poor and marginalized.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> O’Malley, 167.

<sup>14</sup> *Formula of the Institute* 1550, no. 1; in *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts*, ed. John Padberg (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 1996), 4.

<sup>15</sup> O’Malley, 165–99.

<sup>16</sup> Ignatius Loyola, “To the Fathers of the Council of Trent,” Rome, early 1546; trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, John W. Padberg, SJ, and John L. McCarthy, SJ, *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions* (St. Louis: IJS, 2006), 130.

<sup>17</sup> GC 34, d. 6, no. 12; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg (St. Louis: IJS, 2009), 562.

<sup>18</sup> GC 34, d. 9, nos. 7, 14; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 589, 592 (italics in original).

What more Jesuit way to live this proximity to—and solidarity with—the poor and marginalized than by sharing with them spiritual exercises adapted to their particular contexts? This is a form of support that Jesuits and those with Ignatian training are well-suited to offer, and one that is not widely available in secular society. Moreover, while Ignatius allows for and encourages Jesuits to perform works of corporal charity, he advises in his guidelines for selecting missions that, all else being equal, “works aimed at spiritual benefits . . . ought always to be preferred.”<sup>19</sup> Direct spiritual ministry with the poor thus provides an ideal way to live out the Jesuit commitment to those on the margins of society and the church.

In the next part of this essay, I present the response to Francis’s challenge that the Ignatian Spirituality Project offers. Through retreats for men and women experiencing homelessness and in recovery from addiction, this organization has given spiritual accompaniment to the poor while at the same time being evangelized by them. Then, in parts 3 to 5, I review in terms of three principal dynamics the results that participants in these retreats have experienced. Part 3 addresses the movement from shame to self-acceptance and offers a theological reflection on the way that God responds to sin through grace. Part 4 looks at the movement from isolation to relationship, and how this reflects the Trinitarian model of love. Part 5 addresses the movement from self-centeredness to the service of others.

## 2. An Ignatian Response

**T**he Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP) was founded in Chicago in 1998 with the aim of bringing the gift of Ignatian spirituality to the materially poor. One of the co-founders, Fr. William E. Creed (UMI), published an article on ISP in *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS* in 2007, in which he described the origins of the program as well as the nature of the retreats themselves.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on the ten subse-

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<sup>19</sup> *Const.* 623.

<sup>20</sup> William E. Creed, SJ, “Jesuits and the Homeless: Companions on Life’s Journey,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 1.

quent years of institutional experience, I will offer some observations and theological reflections on the impact of these retreats on the participants, both retreatants and facilitators.

Before beginning ISP, Fr. Creed already had a deep background in Ignatian spirituality, having spent many years as a spiritual director at a Jesuit retreat house. ISP's other co-founder, Mr. Edward Shurna, himself a former Jesuit, had a background as a community organizer, working with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. From its beginnings in Chicago, over the course of subsequent years, ISP grew to a network of over thirty cities in the US and Canada where teams of volunteers offer retreats to men and women experiencing homelessness, and in recovery from addiction.

Retreatants are recruited from local transitional housing and residential recovery programs. In ISP's experience, people who are still living on the street or in emergency shelters lack the basic stability needed to enter fully into the spirit of the retreat. Further, the ISP volunteers would have no way to determine whether such individuals may have ongoing issues which could disrupt the retreat—for instance, continued, active use of drugs or alcohol, or serious, untreated mental health issues.<sup>21</sup> The success of a retreat depends considerably on the selection of men and women who are at a place in their lives where they can and want to benefit from this type of experience.

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*By sharing intimately from their own experiences, the facilitators demonstrate their own trust in the group and establish a safe space in which to share.*

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Case managers make the selections at the local ISP team's partner housing and recovery facilities. At a minimum, retreatants need to have been sober for two months, be actively following some type of recovery program (usually Twelve Step-based), and have an interest in attending more deeply to their spiritual lives. Case managers can make exceptions if they consider a certain individual well-suited to this type of retreat: for example, some people who are not in recovery from addiction take

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<sup>21</sup> This is not to deny that such people may need spiritual care, but only that they are not currently appropriate candidates for an ISP retreat.

part, but they still need to be generally familiar with the principles of the Twelve Steps. At residential facilities, the case managers know their clients well enough that they can normally make excellent recommendations regarding those best suited to participate in a retreat of this nature.

ISP describes its retreats as “spiritual but not religious,” thus opening them to individuals from any or no faith tradition. While the majority of retreatants across the network are Christian, many or most do not have a regular faith community. Catholics are clearly a minority, and only a very small number are adherents of non-Christian faiths, notably Islam.<sup>22</sup> A substantial minority have some suspicion of organized religion—hence the importance of qualifying the retreats as “spiritual but not religious” and of assuring potential retreatants that the retreat does not include any preaching. Of course, all these numbers are subject to substantial local variations—for instance, in some cities, virtually all participants are Christian while in others there are very few.

Across the network, ISP teams use a standard weekend retreat format, subject to minor local variations, that draws heavily on elements of both Ignatian spirituality and Twelve-Step programs. In the Ignatian spirit, its starting point is the lived experience of the retreatants. The retreat is designed to help participants discern where God or their Higher Power has been active in their lives and how they have responded or failed to respond to God’s invitations, and it ends with a reflection on where God might be calling them at present.<sup>23</sup>

Some specific retreat exercises are also very Ignatian. The format includes a group guided meditation in which participants imagine themselves in a specific scene, usually taken from scripture. A group examen is used as a closing prayer at the end of the first day and again

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<sup>22</sup> ISP does not ask retreatants to identify their religious affiliation, if any. All of the assessments in this paragraph are personal estimates, based on over thirty-five overnight retreats that I have attended across the US and Canada.

<sup>23</sup> In keeping with the spiritual-but-not-religious motto, and in keeping with the Twelve Steps, ISP generally uses a locution such as *God or your Higher Power*. As this can be cumbersome, I normally explain at the outset while on retreat that when I use only the term *God*, people should take that to mean the Higher Power of their understanding. I will do likewise in this paper—that is, in the sections addressing the ISP retreat, I intend *God* to include *or Higher Power*.

to finish the retreat. Both the guided meditation and examen are new to most participants and are offered as spiritual tools they can take with them and use in daily life.

While certain elements from throughout the four weeks of Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* appear during the retreat, the primary graces being sought come from the disposition days offered by some Ignatian directors to prepare retreatants before embarking on the first week of the Exercises.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the overarching grace sought in the ISP retreat is a sense of being loved and accepted by God. In the Ignatian tradition, this grace is of fundamental importance for the spiritual journey, given that without some sense of being a loved child of God one simply does not have the foundation needed to embark on the challenging work of facing one's own sinfulness, as in the First Week.<sup>25</sup>

For example, while many people can readily see evidence of God's love for them in their families and friends, many ISP retreatants come from situations in which this is difficult, and many have had little experience of genuine love in their lives. In my view, the greatest success we encounter on ISP retreats is for retreatants to feel loved by God and accepted for who they are. And often, the ISP retreat marks the first time that they have experienced this. Such an experience serves as preparation for a new or deepened desire "to live a life in harmony with God's desires," which is the heart of the Principle and Foundation.<sup>26</sup>

Several aspects of the retreat are also drawn specifically from the Twelve-Step tradition. As indicated above, the openness to those of different faith traditions is inspired by the Twelve Steps. More than this, however, the key exercises themselves revolve around each participant sharing from his or her own experience, as at a Twelve Step meeting. All present agree from the outset not to advise others on how they should live their lives, but simply to listen, receiving one another's stories in a non-judgmental fashion. Still, participants are welcomed and encour-

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<sup>24</sup> John Veltri, *Orientations*, vol. 2, ch. 2, accessed February 7, 2017, [http://orientations.jesuits.ca/or2ch1\\_6full.html](http://orientations.jesuits.ca/or2ch1_6full.html); see also Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 28.

<sup>25</sup> Veltri, ch. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Veltri, Prayer Unit 5, [http://orientations.jesuits.ca/disp\\_units.html#5](http://orientations.jesuits.ca/disp_units.html#5).



aged to speak about how their own faith has affected their journey—in-  
deed this is one way in which ISP retreats differ from many Twelve Step  
programs. However, neither retreatants nor facilitators may use the re-  
treat as an opportunity to proselytize, and in this way the ISP retreat  
follows the fifteenth annotation of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The facilitators  
aim not to teach the retreatants but to create a space that “permit[s] the  
Creator to deal directly with the creature.”<sup>27</sup>

In Twelve-Step terms, the retreat focuses on the first three steps:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.<sup>28</sup>

To narrow the focus even more, the heart of the retreat lies in the second step—that is, in a deepening awareness that our Higher Power not only *can* but *wants* to restore our lives, because He or She loves us. Fortified in this sense of being loved by a Higher Power who deeply desires the best for us (which many may be feeling for the first time), the highest aim of the ISP retreat is that we may leave more prepared to carry out the third step—namely, to turn the care of our lives over to God.

Like Twelve-Step meetings, which are member-led, all who are present in an ISP retreat participate equally throughout the retreat—there is no sharp division between facilitators and retreatants. In other words, while the facilitators do lead the various exercises, they also participate in them, sharing from their own life stories as much as do the retreatants, which distinguishes the role of the ISP facilitator from that of Ignatian spiritual directors, who do not share about their own lives in the context of giving direction.

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<sup>27</sup> *SpEx* 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001), 59; italics original.



This mutuality serves at least three ends. First, it can establish trust very quickly—of key importance, given that most participants do not know one another and that the retreat lasts only about twenty-four hours. One of the facilitators is the first in the group to share. By sharing intimately from their own experiences, the facilitators demonstrate their own trust in the group and establish a safe space. Second, in this way the facilitators model appropriate sharing, in terms of both depth and timing.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, while ISP retreats are marketed as offering Ignatian spirituality to the materially poor, from the outset this was only half of the reason for beginning the program. The other half was to create opportunities for Jesuits—who at the beginning comprised the majority of the retreat facilitators—to encounter the poor.<sup>29</sup> For many years, the large majority of facilitators across the network have been lay people, and this still holds true. In short, the retreats are not a place where those who have much simply give to those who have not; rather, they are a site of mutual encounter where all find together the possibility of personal transformation. From this perspective, all who participate have wisdom to offer from the experiences of their own lives, and all likewise have much to receive from their fellow participants.

Much of the richness of the ISP retreat comes from its weaving together of elements from both Ignatian spirituality and the Twelve Steps. The close parallels between these two traditions have been recognized from very early in the history of AA.<sup>30</sup> At a fundamental level, both offer a path to greater freedom: freedom from addictions, inordinate attachments and unhealthy fears; and freedom for greater love of oneself, of others, of God. In addition, both traditions offer practical steps to discover God's will in one's life and to find the freedom and the strength to

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<sup>29</sup> From a personal conversation with Fr. Creed, SJ.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Robert Fitzgerald, "Father Ed Dowling and AA's Bill W," accessed on February 7, 2017, <http://www.barefootsworld.net/aafreddowling.html>; Edward Dowling, "Catholic Asceticism and the Twelve Steps," accessed on February 7, 2017, [http://venerablemattalbotresourcecenter.blogspot.ca/2009/09/catholic-asceticism-and-twelve-steps\\_27.html](http://venerablemattalbotresourcecenter.blogspot.ca/2009/09/catholic-asceticism-and-twelve-steps_27.html); Jim Harbaugh, *A 12-Step Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1997).

follow it. During the ISP retreat, participants move toward that two-fold freedom by cultivating an awareness of themselves as beloved children of God.

The retreat advances toward this goal through a series of six movements. The first is that of welcome. The selection of a nice retreat house as a setting is a key part of the welcome. While those of a Gnostic bent

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*Very often, people can share something that has been weighing them down and that they have never been able to share with anyone before.*

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might consider the retreat's physical surroundings of little moment, those who reject that heresy can appreciate its importance. Bringing retreatants to a beautiful location outside of the city, offering

them their own bedrooms, serving high quality food—all of these things state in a non-verbal way that they are people of dignity deserving of fine things. Especially for those unaccustomed to these small luxuries, this can have a considerable impact, prompting them to think that maybe—just maybe—they are worth more than their typical surroundings would have them believe.

Upon arrival, facilitators greet retreatants as guests—as friends whom they are happy to see. Before beginning the formal part of the retreat, everyone shares coffee and snacks with one another. For the initial exercise, each person chooses a partner that he or she does not know, and they introduce themselves, giving everyone the opportunity to share, to listen, and to know someone else on the retreat. In sum, a proper welcome sets the stage for going deeper.

The second movement is that of fear and trust. With the whole group sitting in a circle, and after a brief introduction and moment of silent reflection, participants are invited to share a fear that they have overcome (at least partially) in their lives, and one with which they still struggle. As always, the facilitator leading this exercise is the first to share, setting the tone and establishing the circle as a safe space. In leaving the circle, participants are given some related passages from Scripture that they can use for prayer and reflection during personal time. The movement here is akin to the progression from AA's first to second step—that is, articulating one's fears to oneself and to the group as a

first step toward overcoming those fears. Through this act of vulnerability, participants place their trust in the group, learning that they are not alone, as in times of fear can often seem to be the case. Ultimately, this shows and develops trust in God: the faith that God can heal the retreatant is strengthened by recalling a time when God already has.

The third movement is the sharing of one's own story. It begins with one team member—the "witness"—sharing his or her story with the group. Typically, the witness is a former ISP retreatant. Witnesses share what they have been through at the depths of their addiction, when they were most distant from God, and how they have been able to move past that to a renewed relationship with God, with themselves, and with others, concluding with some of the graces and challenges of their lives in the present. This story should resonate with the retreatants, offering hope that there is life after addiction and homelessness—that if God could love this witness despite all that he or she has done, then maybe God could love the retreatant too.

Inspired by the witness's talk, the participants move into small groups where each person can share his or her own story in greater depth. The facilitators encourage a frank acknowledgement of the pain of the past, but from the perspective that in claiming one's own story one can allow God's healing power to act in one's life. The rest of the group listens and receives each person's sacred story in a nonjudgmental way, demonstrating concretely that God's love is greater than anything wrong one has done and greater than anything that one has suffered. Indeed, simply being heard without judgment can itself be transformative for many people. This movement draws on the dynamics of the First Week of the *Exercises*, where retreatants are led to wonder at God's continuing love for them despite the darkness in their past.<sup>31</sup>

The fourth movement is being with God. After a considerable amount of in-depth sharing, some silent, personal time allows people the opportunity to pray, reflect, and simply be alone with God. This silence can be a real gift for people coming from very busy environments in which there is often little privacy.

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<sup>31</sup> *SpEx* 60.

The fifth movement is healing of memories, many of which need healing. Typically, at this point a facilitator leads a guided meditation, usually centered around one of the healing stories in the Gospels. The purpose is to grow in the conviction that God really does want to heal us and in fact offers healing to us. Ideally, participants find here a taste of that healing, taking at least one step in what is usually a long process. This segment normally ends with a ritual of dropping stones, which represent what needs to be healed, into a bowl of water. This allows the group to enact the healing in a context of communal support.

The sixth and final movement, which takes place on the following morning, is known as “where do we go from here?” It can be difficult to bring the experience of the retreat back into one’s ordinary life. Often people say that they are now heading “back to the real world,” as if what was experienced on the retreat was not itself real; instead, the facilitators emphasize that the experience of the retreat has been very real indeed. After some introductory remarks from a facilitator, the group returns to the same small groups as the previous afternoon. All are invited to reflect on some of the fruits of the retreat—on something particular in their lives that they would like to leave behind, and on something from the retreat that they would like to bring into their daily lives.

Naming these fruits helps to make them real, allowing God’s transformative work in each person to continue. In this way, it gives participants something concrete to recall in the coming days, weeks and months—especially when life gets difficult, as it inevitably will. For example, instead of just remembering a vague feeling of peace from the retreat, a person may describe reconciling with a loved one, feeling that God had been present in his or her life even at times when not aware of it, or that there really is a peace within that others cannot take. This movement reflects Ignatius’s tenth rule for discernment in the First Week: when in consolation, to “store up a supply of strength as defense against . . . the time of ensuing desolation.”<sup>32</sup>

In Twelve-Step terms, the retreat begins by moving from the First to the Second Step—to trusting one another enough to share intimate

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<sup>32</sup> *SpEx* 323.

fears, nurturing the faith that God can restore them to a better life. Participants then end the retreat ready to make the move from the Second to the Third Step. With a deeper faith that God really does love them, care for them, and want the best for them, despite anything they may have done or been through, they feel more ready to turn their wills and their lives over to God, in the faith that God can and will bring healing and a life of freedom and abundance. In Ignatian terms, having experienced themselves as loved children of God, retreatants leave with a grace of the Principle and Foundation: a renewed resolve to live according to God's desires as they understand them.

### 3. From Shame to Acceptance, From Sin to Grace

Having reviewed the theory and structure of the ISP retreat, I turn now to its impact on the lives of participants. I address this impact within the context of three general movements that appear in the self-reporting of many former ISP retreatants: shame to acceptance, isolation to relationship, and self-centeredness to a desire to reach out to others in need. My observations are from *Stories of Hope*, a book published by ISP in which are collected the stories of retreat participants, and from my personal experiences on the more than thirty-five ISP retreats in which I have participated.<sup>33</sup>

A theme that arises repeatedly among ISP retreatants is the movement from shame to acceptance—from a complete lack of self-worth to an awareness of being loved. Nearly all retreatants have family histories that would make most of those in the middle class blanch. The lack of love during the upbringing of many of the participants has a profound impact on their image of themselves. Angie Bakely states the matter plainly:

Right from the beginning, I felt unwanted. I am the youngest of thirteen children, born to a mother who didn't know she was pregnant for many months and a father who wanted my mother to get an abortion. Obviously, my mother chose not to

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<sup>33</sup> Ignatian Spirituality Project [ISP], *Stories of Hope* (Chicago: Ignatian Spirituality Project, 2016).

abort me, but she was overwhelmed with so many children and I grew up feeling unwanted and unloved.<sup>34</sup>

Rene Petaway was abandoned by her mother and raised by grandparents, who, in their fifties, did not want the burden.<sup>35</sup> Danny Prowell grew up in the projects and faced his first criminal charges at the age of twelve.<sup>36</sup> These examples are all too typical. The attendant feelings of shame, of self-loathing, of not being someone who is worthy of love, are among the key factors driving the addictive behaviors of the retreatants, and they themselves attest to this connection: “shame and self-loathing fueled my addiction.”<sup>37</sup> Antoinette Hollins is even more direct: “drugs became the only medication I could find that eliminated my discomfort and feelings of being unwanted.”<sup>38</sup>

Note that this is not the productive sense of guilt that comes with considering one’s sins and sinfulness, and that a skilled director can use to turn the retreatant toward God, as in the First Week of the Exercises. Rather, this is the deep disgust with oneself that tempts one to think of oneself as beyond help and thus presents a considerable obstacle to experiencing God’s love at all.

In contrast to this message of unworthiness, which many retreatants have received throughout their lives, the ISP retreat welcomes and treats retreatants with love:

The first thing I remember was how welcome I felt. Walking into the room, I saw a circle of chairs with a beautiful centerpiece in the middle. There were women of all ages gathered there with beautiful inviting smiles on their faces, and arms outstretched for a warm embrace.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 69.

<sup>37</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 40.

This atmosphere of welcome sets the stage for the deeper work of the retreat. As Angie Bakely states, “my fears started to go away when I was greeted so kindly and warmly by the facilitators.”<sup>40</sup> With fears receding, retreatants are better able to reach that crucial place of vulnerability from which deep sharing can proceed.

Sharing one’s story is the heart of the retreat, and it can be a powerful experience. Very often, people can share something that has been weighing them down and that they have never been able to share with anyone before.<sup>41</sup> That this story is received with love rather than judgment is crucial, and for many a new experience. Marina Dominguez shares that

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*On ISP retreats, one repeatedly encounters the depths to which a lack of self-worth can bring someone.*

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“for the first time in my life I found people who genuinely cared about me and my feelings. I had people that really listened to what I was saying. I began to feel comfortable asking for support and I realized that I had people to pray for me at those times I could not pray for myself.”<sup>42</sup>

Amanda Asque notes that after sharing her story on retreat she felt that if other people could love and accept her, despite knowing her history, then maybe God could love and accept her, too. This movement lies at the heart of the retreat.<sup>43</sup> And while the facilitators serve as models of God’s love for people who have had precious few concrete encounters with that love, the facilitators often also encounter God’s love for them through the retreatants. As Angie Bakely says, “the retreat helped me to realize that I am loved and I am beautiful on the inside and on the outside. And I know that God is always with me because he didn’t bring me this far just to leave me.”<sup>44</sup> Dave C. makes a similar point very succinctly: “I went home

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<sup>40</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 45.

<sup>41</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 6.

<sup>44</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 45.



with a deeper sense of my own worth and a new openness towards others and Christ."<sup>45</sup>

While it can be tempting to psychologize this transformation from shame to acceptance, to do so would underestimate the profound spiritual and theological connection between these two aspects of the human person. However, while theologians often discuss distance from and closeness to God in terms of *sin* and *grace*, participants do not use these words on an ISP retreat, where focus on sin without groundedness in God's love might perpetuate the shame cycle.

It can help, for instance, to consider Sebastian Moore's thoughts on original sin and grace, which can illuminate the theological aspect of the dynamics one sees among ISP retreatants. Instead of seeing original sin as a singular action, the results of which have been transmitted through the generations, Moore sees it primarily as a profound lack of self-worth that prevents one from entering into full relationship with God and others.<sup>46</sup> The voice of original sin, he explains, is the voice of the accuser insisting that I am worthless, and there is nothing to be done about it.

Noting that *Satan* means "the Accuser," Moore claims that we are beset by "accusations . . . which constantly undermine our feelings of self-worth. These feelings of self-disesteem cast a shadow on our relationships with God and our fellows."<sup>47</sup> In Ignatian terms, these accusations come from the enemy of our human nature, who, sensing an individual's point of weakness, attacks relentlessly, with a ferocity greater than that of any wild animal.<sup>48</sup> The resulting shame is compounded by a related sense of guilt at failing God and our neighbor—at not being the person whom we sense on some level that we should be. Further, we are subject to a strong inertial force that tells us that new life is not possible

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<sup>45</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Sebastian Moore, *The Fire and the Rose Are One* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1980), 68–9.

<sup>47</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Introducing Contemporary Theologies: The What and the Who of Theology Today*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 74.

<sup>48</sup> *SpEx* 325.



and that prevents us from growing.<sup>49</sup> From this perspective, original sin casts human beings not as guilty heirs of the perpetrator of a primordial evil deed but as victims in need of healing.<sup>50</sup>

God's response to sin is the grace that comes to us through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Moore describes Jesus as the one who, as at his baptism, "is able to hear unimpeded the voice of the Beloved: You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased."<sup>51</sup> Jesus in turn opens the ears and hearts of others to this fundamental, liberating truth. Awakening to one's own value and goodness—that is, undergoing conversion—typically begins on the human level when one becomes aware of another person's love. But this human love will always be imperfect in that it will not value a person in his or her entirety. That need can only come to complete fulfilment by a deep, personal encounter with God, wherein we experience ourselves as God's beloved.<sup>52</sup> Recipients of grace through this awakening, we then can experience ourselves as we really are: as desirable beings of great worth because God desires and loves us. This grace does not eliminate the suffering that we have experienced in our lives, just as Christ's resurrection did not remove the marks of his wounds. But our own scars can offer us a means by which to mediate God's love for others.<sup>53</sup>

Through this conversion experience, we begin to see and experience God as love rather than as power, which dispels our feelings of guilt and inadequacy and enables us to love God and neighbor.<sup>54</sup> In this way, we become free to imitate Jesus: to enjoy open, intimate relationships with God and others, and to help bring God's kingdom into being. As such, conversion enables us to reorient our entire system of values and to cooperate with the grace we have received, rather than to contin-

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<sup>49</sup> Sebastian Moore, *Let This Mind Be in You: The Quest for Identity Through Oedipus to Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1985), 85.

<sup>50</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Creation, Grace, and Redemption* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 79.

<sup>51</sup> Ormerod, *The Fire and the Rose Are One*, xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Ormerod, *Let This Mind Be in You*, 142.

<sup>53</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Grace and Disgrace: A Theology of Self-Esteem, Society, and History* (Newtown, NSW: E. J. Dwyer, 1992), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Ormerod, *The Fire and the Rose Are One*, 92.

ue in self-destructive patterns based on the (false) idea that we have no worth.<sup>55</sup> In short, secure in God's love, we are able to reach out toward others with that same love.

On ISP retreats, one repeatedly encounters the depths to which a lack of self-worth can bring someone. Growing up neglected or abandoned by one's parents, being told in a multitude of ways that one is worthless and will never amount to anything—the ill effects of such treatment are many and wide-ranging, not least on the spiritual level. Many people report having gone through precisely the dynamic that Moore describes, interiorizing all these accusing voices and concluding that *if I am a bad person anyway, then I might as well do bad things*. As one man put it to me succinctly in a personal conversation, his father always told him that he would never be anything but a thief. His decades-long response, to spite his father, was to be the best damned thief out there, thus accepting tragically his father's judgment that he could not do anything better.

As we see in the stories of those participating in ISP retreats, the effect of original sin is very real, insistently telling us that we are worthless and that to try to change is futile. But just as real is the healing and transformative power of God's grace. The former thief described above began to see that he was much more than the sins of his past—much more than his father's denigration of him—and came to a fresh understanding of himself through an experience of God's love for him. There was a powerful moment of grace at the end of the first ISP retreat I attended, when a man in his fifties, who had sinned much but had been the victim of much sin by others, stood up and, with a tear in his eye, shared that he now felt for the first time in his life that he was worthy of being loved. Over the course of dozens of retreats, this was the principal dynamic that I encountered—people who felt that they had no value at all, coming to see that God might in fact love them.

Here in the flesh appears a key grace of the disposition days of the Exercises: to know oneself as a beloved child of God. This liber-

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<sup>55</sup> Ormerod, *Grace and Disgrace*, 31.

ating awakening is greatly facilitated by an encounter with human love and caring, which has been in very short supply in the lives of so many. As one retreatant described her experience of sharing her story with a loving, non-judgmental group of women, "it was like, 'wait a minute—they care about us? They know we stole, we were raped, we were molested and they still cared?! Where is the camera? Is this real? God is in ALL of this?'"<sup>56</sup> In discovering the truth that, despite the many shadows in her life, others still could love her, she found that even God loved her. This liberation has formed the foundation for her building a whole new life for herself, which she could never have imagined before.

These stories serve to anchor Moore's theology in human experience. The depth of pain and transformation evident in them shows the dramatic ways in which people can live out these theological realities. On this point, Marina Dominguez shares:

I have always struggled with depression and thoughts that the world would be better off without me. I now see those times as God wanting me to get closer to Him and to lean on Him. To the world I am one, but to ONE I am the world!!! I know, now, how much I am loved and I thank ISP for helping me to discover that.<sup>57</sup>

What better example of God's grace could there be than, after years of depression, coming to see how much one is truly loved by God?

Likewise, retreatant Angie Bakely came to see how much she is worth in God's eyes, contrary to the deceptive voices that had always told her otherwise:

I have also learned that I matter and that I don't need anyone's approval, except my own. The retreat helped me to realize that I am loved and I am beautiful on the inside and on the outside. And I know that God is always with me because he didn't bring me this far just to leave me now. . . . Since I went on that first ISP retreat people look at me differently. I

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<sup>56</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 42.

even walk and talk differently because I have confidence that comes from sobriety and knowing that I am loved.<sup>58</sup>

To summarize, the retreat is a place where, instead of hearing the persistent voice of the accuser, one can open oneself to hear God's voice, can open oneself to healing. In Ignatian terms, to discern and distinguish the voice of God from the voice of the enemy, as the rules for the discernment of spirits direct, one must first actually hear the voice of God. The ISP retreat creates a space that enables retreatants to do so. For retreatant Erwin Jugarap, this led to a profound transformation. Walking the Stations of the Cross, he heard his "father's voice telling me that he forgave me. In that moment I felt free of my past. I felt hope. In touching the wounds of Jesus, I knew that my own wounds could be healed."<sup>59</sup>

The many voices accusing one of being worthless can hold people captive for years, decades, lifetimes, in hopeless spirals of self-destruction. Convinced that they deserve nothing better, in despair, they repeatedly act in ways that harm themselves and others, thus confirming their own worst assessment of themselves. Into the midst of this darkness, though, a glimmer of hope can enter. In this way, an encounter with God that affirms one as good, as loved, and as desired can have a monumental transformative impact.

#### 4. From Isolation to Community: A Sharing in Trinitarian Love

**A**nother key movement found repeatedly among ISP retreatants is from a sense of isolation to relationship with others. While on a physical level many people experiencing homelessness have to spend a lot of time in very close proximity to others, it can nonetheless be very lonely.<sup>60</sup> In soup kitchens and shelters, people eat and sleep

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<sup>58</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 45–46.

<sup>59</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 86.

<sup>60</sup> I draw here primarily from my own experience of staying in homeless shelters and eating in soup kitchens for ten nights in 2010, in Ottawa, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, and Winnipeg. Note, however, that I, unlike many of those whom I encountered during

virtually pressed up one against the other. Yet this physical proximity does not entail friendship or close personal relationships. The clients of these institutions are just as aware as the staff that many among them are suffering from mental health and addiction problems, in addition to their evident material poverty. Much more so than in the normal daily interactions of an average middle-class person, a large number of the people one meets when experiencing homelessness may well be

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*Walking the Stations of the Cross, he heard his "father's voice telling me that he forgave me. In that moment I felt free of my past. I felt hope."*

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looking for a way to steal the little one has. It is difficult to know whom to trust. This leads to a real guardedness in dealings with fellow clients. Of course, this is not to say that people experiencing homelessness do not develop real friendships as well, but only that the environment in which they live is generally one that encourages suspicion of others and punishes those who make themselves vulnerable.

But even ISP facilitators, regardless of whether or not they themselves have been homeless, can find deep and enriching connection with others. Among middle-class professionals, for instance, it is common to meet and interact with many people in a range of settings, and happily most of these interactions are characterized by a default baseline of trust. Nonetheless, in getting to know others in both professional and social settings, all too often people focus almost exclusively on their accomplishments, on their projects, and on what is going well in their lives. For many, it is rare to share with others on a deeper level, which involves making oneself vulnerable and talking about one's fears and attachments—on those things that are holding one back. Even more rare to do so with people outside one's social class.

On this point, the experience of men and women on ISP retreats shows how transformative genuine community can be. Coming together in a safe space and having the opportunity to hear the stories of others

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that short time, could have found other accommodations had I so chosen—and on some nights, I did so choose. That said, subsequent discussions with those who have experienced homelessness on a longer-term basis have confirmed that many of them share my own reflections of loneliness in this environment.

in all their depth can even in a short time soften people's hearts. Very often people share with the group something important that they have never been able to share before in their lives. People feel connected with one another in an intimate way, and this in turn can help them feel more closely connected with God. In many cases this also leads to the healing of relationships with other people in their lives.

For instance, it is common for ISP retreatants to harbor feelings that they are the only ones going through the challenges that they face, and these feelings can contribute to a strong sense of isolation. But on retreat, people discover that they are not alone, as retreatant Ennis Adams states clearly: "the people that I met and the stories that I heard were so similar to mine. I couldn't believe it! I thought I was the only one going through all of this stuff. The retreat strengthened me in so many ways. I felt God's presence and peace and it helped me to continue in my sobriety."<sup>61</sup> Along similar lines, Danny Prowell shares that "I bonded with some guys. These guys were thinking just like I was thinking. That was the beautiful thing about it—I'm not alone. That's what the retreat shows you, you're not alone."<sup>62</sup>

Hearing the stories of others helps to open one's heart, so that one can share one's own story: "I felt big doors had opened wide in my heart. On the retreat, I heard a witness share her story. I felt it was such a blessing. It made me want to share my story."<sup>63</sup> In this way, over the course of the retreat, people are enabled and empowered to share more of themselves, to enter more deeply into the community. In the words of another retreatant, "as the weekend progressed and I gradually stepped out of my apprehension into the spirit of the moment, a view of the real value of relationships crept in. . . . I found the opportunity and willingness to step beyond some of my self-imposed boundaries."<sup>64</sup>

The powerful transformations that can occur simply from sharing one's story, and finding that one is not alone, should come as no sur-

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<sup>61</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 12.

<sup>62</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 71–72.

<sup>63</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 73.

prise to one familiar with the Spiritual Exercises. One of the enemy's great strategies, Ignatius writes in the thirteenth rule for discernment for the First Week, is to act like a seducer. The enemy "seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered."<sup>65</sup> He will whisper to people not to share what they are going through, that no-one else will understand them, that their openness would only be met with judgment and condemnation of their many failings. It is only through transparency, the courage to share with others in an appropriate setting what they are tempted to keep hidden, that retreatants recognize these whispers of the enemy as the lies they are. Instead of confirming their sense of being alone, they find that others share their troubles; instead of condemnation, they find acceptance and love.

And as suggested earlier, this sense of greater connection with one another in a spiritual setting can lead to a closer connection to God, or to one's Higher Power. As Gino Lloyd writes:

When we sit in that circle and one man is talking and he can go into the depths of his soul, do you know how powerful that is? He can talk about anything he wants to between him and God. . . . For me, the experience was a reconnection with God and with community. I felt rejuvenated and spiritually connected.<sup>66</sup>

In a similar vein, Jay Burke writes about finding his "most direct road to God" through relationship with the men he encounters on retreats and at weekly follow-up gatherings: "their authentic humility, mutual love, and radical faith in God humble and inspire me."<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, this sense of community can last and bear fruit well beyond the ending of the retreat itself. Retreatant Marina Dominguez explains:

A lot of the walls I had put up to keep people out came down as a result of that retreat. I'm not saying it was all at once, but gradually, over time, my light shone brighter as my armor

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<sup>65</sup> *SpEx* 326.

<sup>66</sup> *ISP, Stories of Hope*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> *ISP, Stories of Hope*, 77.



came off. . . . I feel the presence of my angels of ISP when I am fighting my inner battles. I feel like I walk with an army now even when I am alone and have feelings of not feeling safe or strong.<sup>68</sup>

In many cases, the fruits of this renewed connection to God and others then leads to the healing of other relationships in retreatants' lives. Following a retreat, one man was inspired to reconcile with his daughter after ten years of estrangement.<sup>69</sup> Rene Petaway, who had been abandoned as a child by her mother to be raised by her grandparents, shares that "experiencing these retreats has made me a totally different, better person. When I got back I was able to meet with my mother, express to her my true feelings."<sup>70</sup> Through that renewed relationship, Ms. Petaway came to understand that her mother had done the best she could in difficult circumstances: "we made amends and have a great relationship today."<sup>71</sup>

This close connection between community with others—sharing of oneself, receiving the gift of the other—and a renewed relationship with God reflects the mystery of the Trinity. As creatures made in the image of a triune God, our relations with others are a key aspect of our path to God. We are not called to work out our salvation in isolation, as individuals aiming primarily at our own sanctification. Rather, like God, we are called to relation with others, and it is through these relationships that we find God.<sup>72</sup>

Theologian Miroslav Volf argues that, in our world of sin, Trinitarian love inevitably takes the form of the cross. Acts of love are often not reciprocated, or even received as intended. As is seen in the story of Jesus himself, and in countless martyrs since, expressing God's love in word and deed is not without risk: it can lead to rejection and even

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<sup>68</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 40–41.

<sup>69</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 76.

<sup>70</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 23.

<sup>71</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 383.



violent death. Yet taking this risk is precisely what characterizes God's love when it encounters our sinful world—it is no longer perfectly mutual, but extends even to those who hate us. This is the love with which God loves our “deeply flawed world,” and it is the love that Christians are called to live, which bit by bit transforms “the unjust, deceitful, and violent kingdoms of this world into the just, truthful and peaceful ‘kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah.’”<sup>73</sup>

This model of Trinitarian love encountering a sinful world appears in God's sending of the Son—that is, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Christ's “downward movement” into the world is a form of self-emptying, undertaken in order to enter into communion with us.<sup>74</sup> In the *Exercises* this appears in the contemplation on the Incarnation, where the Trinity, looking down at the sin of the world, decides not to condemn it but instead to send the Son for our salvation.<sup>75</sup> Such love requires giving of oneself, as Christ does both on the cross and through the Eucharist. It also means receiving the other, as Christ did throughout his earthly ministry. Christ repeatedly welcomed the outcast, although his doing so antagonized the authorities. Following his example, we empty ourselves, leaving behind our self-centered attitudes, desires for personal gain, comfortable social circles, and easy judgments of those different from ourselves. Moving outside our ordinary circles, we thus take a risk by making ourselves vulnerable.

Loving one another in this way can also bring genuine consolation. Welcoming and loving others, especially those who are normally excluded, “creates a community of joy in the midst of suffering,” where all people are accepted as unique creations of God, regardless of the ways that they may be devalued in the broader society.<sup>76</sup> Further, the self-understanding of each person in the community is not entirely fixed, but is deeply affected and even changed by the others. Genuine community is not a matter of self-enclosed persons having only external

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<sup>73</sup> Miroslav Volf, “The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 3 (1998), 413, 415.

<sup>74</sup> Volf, “The Trinity Is Our Social Program,” 417.

<sup>75</sup> *SpEx* 102.

<sup>76</sup> Volf, “The Trinity Is Our Social Program,” 418.

relationships, bumping into one another like billiard balls. Rather, we open up to one another in such a way that our very selves are changed by the encounter. Some boundaries are maintained, or else our identities would be completely dissolved; but these boundaries are marked by a certain fluidity. In this new community of joy and life, the distinctness of each is not subsumed but is preserved; some are not subordinated to others, but all come to live in harmony. Through this communion, we can, to a degree, begin to participate in the divine love of the Trinity.

The experience of ISP retreatants manifests both the communal life and the movement of self-donation that typify participation in the Trinity,

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*Following a retreat, one man was inspired to reconcile with his daughter after ten years of estrangement.*

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and both lead to a transformation of the participants. Both the communal aspect and the importance for participants of moving from a place of isolation to one of relationship are

key moments of the ISP retreat. The founder, Fr. Creed, emphasizes its centrality: "homeless men and women in recovery join together on retreat with volunteer facilitators to form a new community. This new community is founded on a shared commitment to the spiritual journey and the non-judgmental sharing with one another of our own sacred stories."<sup>77</sup>

One retreatant, Angie Bakely, notes that it was on the ISP retreat that she found "a feeling of belonging. By sharing my story and hearing others share theirs, ISP brings a feeling of family to me."<sup>78</sup> This mutuality reflects the mutual love described in the *Contemplatio*, and Ignatius's note that love consists in sharing with one another.<sup>79</sup> In a place of isolation, as experienced by so many, we have difficulty growing into the image of a relational God. Offering this space of genuine community empowers all participants, enabling them more fully to participate in this divine reality. Tina Morrow puts it succinctly: "the love and trust I felt there with all of the women was powerful and energizing."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 1.

<sup>78</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 46.

<sup>79</sup> *SpEx* 231.

<sup>80</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 48.

The particular form of the ISP retreat community also reflects the Trinity inasmuch as it involves a movement of self-donation to the others who are present. Of course, it is tempting to see this movement primarily on the part of the facilitators, who are reaching out from a place of material prosperity and stability of life toward those who lack these things. But this would be incomplete, since facilitators and retreatants both give of themselves, although in somewhat different ways.

For their part, facilitators often come from a place of relative material comfort and security; nonetheless, they opt for the duration of the retreat to make themselves vulnerable to members of a more impoverished social class with whom they would normally have little or no interaction—people whom they often see as very different—as “other”—before their engagement with ISP. To this point, facilitator Tom Baldonado speaks of how “awkward” he always felt when approached by men and women experiencing homelessness—“not wanting to make eye contact,” looking for an easy way to give a dollar and move on.<sup>81</sup> Yet something deeper continued to nag at him, and he eventually found himself participating in an ISP retreat, leaving his area of comfort and his presuppositions. Rather than spend a fun weekend with family and friends or working to advance his career, he decided to take the risk to share deeply with men whom he did not know, with whom he probably shared few common interests, and who certainly could offer no prospects of professional advancement: a true image of self-emptying, of self-donation.

On the part of the retreatants, however, the element of self-donation can appear less present. Simply on the material level, the retreat center is usually a nicer place than their own residences, and the food generally tastes better. However, focusing on these external elements can lead us to forget what an alien environment the retreat center is for most ISP retreatants. The majority rarely have heard of a retreat and have no idea to what type of place they are going, what it will be like, or what they will do. What they do suspect is that they will not see anyone they know, or even anyone to whom they easily can relate, because they do not know anyone who has been on a retreat. Add to this the element

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<sup>81</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 58.

of risk inherent in getting in a car with a facilitator whom they have not met, who is going to drive them to some unknown place, and the aspect of self-emptying becomes more apparent. In short, the retreatants manifest real courage in taking the step to attend an ISP retreat.

There is also a somewhat subtler aspect to this movement: the generosity of heart required to move beyond oneself, to leave behind one's area of comfort, the people with whom one normally associates. This is required from both facilitators and retreatants. As a new facilitator I was afraid that the retreatants would not accept me. Why would a group of primarily African-American men, in recovery from drug addiction, many of whom have criminal records, want to share their stories with an over-educated white man from the suburbs? Whatever story of my own I could share, surely it would only reinforce the vast distance between us, rather than bring us closer. The retreatants experience similar fears.

Danny Prowell, who was not accustomed to socializing with professionals, notes his initial suspicion in encountering the facilitators: "one guy was an architect, one was a dentist. A lot of us [retreatants] asked, why are y'all [facilitators] talking to us, why are y'all here? What's the motive? Why do you want to talk to me?"<sup>82</sup> I recall also an African-American man who, in the midst of sharing with me a number of painful episodes that he had never shared before, lamented the fact that the only people who reached out to him to listen in this way were white. Why were there not other black men who would listen? I do not know the answer to that question, which of course reflects only his own personal experience at that time. But I do know that for him to open up to me despite the many differences between us required a tremendous letting go of his own thoughts and feelings in order to enter into relationship with someone with whom he normally would not associate.

And where can this self-emptying lead? In my experience, it can lead to building a closer, more authentic and intimate community. As Fr. Creed states, "we find that below the superficial differences of our lives, below the societal barriers between us, our common humanity

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<sup>82</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 71.

runs deep. We find a new purpose in belonging to the ISP community, a community which teems with hope.”<sup>83</sup>

Among first-time facilitators, the most common reaction at the end of the retreat is surprise at how much they have in common with the retreatants. In my case, I had assumed that I, a comfortable, middle-class professional, had little or nothing in common with someone experiencing homelessness and recovering from addiction. I quickly learned how wrong I had been.

A similar dynamic operates among the retreatants; but the retreat often upends these assumptions. Danny Prowell, who had been suspicious of the motives of the architects and dentists with whom he would never typically associate, found, to his surprise:

those guys are open, and they got their own issues! [When you're homeless] you're walking around these streets and people don't speak to you. They look at you like you're a can on the street. Somebody talking to you, that's a big thing. Your self-esteem is so low, you feel like you're nothing. When people show you that you are a person, and they tell you their own problems, it opens things up. It's not a black and white thing, or a rich and poor thing, it's a "you" thing, do "you" want to do better?<sup>84</sup>

Amanda Asque notes the turning point on the retreat for her as the moment that a facilitator shared: "her own questions and vulnerabilities. . . . I never thought we could have things in common. . . . It was not because it resembled what I had gone through. It wasn't gritty or grimy but it was real and it resonated with me."<sup>85</sup> A facilitator, Karen Clifton, notes that "[w]e are all broken," we have all experienced different forms of homelessness and addiction, "and it is through God's mercy, experienced through community, that we are restored."<sup>86</sup> The widely-shared assumptions about the vast differences between us are exploded in the

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<sup>83</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 1.

<sup>84</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 71.

<sup>85</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 6.

<sup>86</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 75.

course of an ISP retreat. All participants share their fears, hopes, and experiences of God, and inevitably find that, while surface details may differ, the underlying issues are remarkably similar. In this coming together, no-one leaves the same as when he or she arrived, and all find together a life-giving community.

In this way, the experience of the ISP retreat enriches and adds to the theological understanding of self-donation. It shows in a concrete way what is actually called for: leaving behind areas of material and social comfort, letting go of presumptions about others, and having the courage to encounter them in a vulnerable way. The format of the retreat treats all participants as equals, with all taking on different roles at different times. The facilitators share as much as do the retreatants. The retreatants in turn have opportunities to lead—for instance in leading morning prayer or blessing a meal. In opening up to one another over the course of the retreat, participants find that the hitherto presumed distance between them was more shadow than substance. Through the encounter, all are transformed. This movement reflects a key grace of the Fourth Week of the Exercises: an intimacy that involves the building of a “community where all are loved into the fullness of life.”<sup>87</sup>

Stephen Hopkins, a DC retreatant, speaks eloquently of the transformation that he experienced through his participation in ISP:

When you look on the face of man, you look on the face of God. I want to treat people in that Godly fashion. I look at the Godliness in every person because I want them to see it in me. No matter how much chaos and negativity is in a person, I’m going to recognize the God in them and show them the God in me.<sup>88</sup>

Rene Petaway explains that she “learned how to have more compassion, in terms of listening to someone else’s pain, I’ve learned how to walk through things and not be in fear, which is a big relief.”<sup>89</sup> And Amanda

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<sup>87</sup> Monty Williams, SJ, *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy: Following the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009), 317.

<sup>88</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 55.

<sup>89</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 23.

Asque sums up her own change: “before the retreat I didn’t trust nothing or nobody. Because I was just hurt every time I did. Before this retreat, I did NOT like feeling vulnerable. But on the retreat I got in touch with places in my consciousness that had been uninhabited for a LONG time. I felt human on this retreat.”<sup>90</sup>

The facilitators are likewise transformed. From seeing men and women experiencing homelessness as essentially different, and feeling awkward around them, Tom Baldonado came to be inspired by the spirituality of the retreatants in a way that has strongly impacted his own spiritual journey.<sup>91</sup> Most ISP facilitators would and do say something similar.<sup>92</sup>

From this perspective, the ISP retreat can offer a genuine participation in the life of the Trinity. We find that we are most truly ourselves not when isolated, or in groups segregated by race or class. Overcoming our initial fears, we let go of our assumptions about others, about what divides us. Encountering others who seem on the surface very different from ourselves, we find a deep, shared humanity, and we are transformed by that encounter. We take the risk of vulnerability, trusting that the others will receive us as we are, and in turn receive in love those on retreat with us. Sharing some of our deepest sorrows with one another as a community, we find a deeper joy.

## 5. From Community to Reaching Out to Others

**T**he personal encounter with God, rooted in a loving community, which awakens one to one’s true value and goodness, can bring about genuine conversion. But the converted individual and community do not remain within themselves—instead they are inspired and empowered to reach out to others who find themselves in need of healing. This is the dynamic we find in the Contemplation to Attain Love, which ends the *Exercises*: inflamed with God’s tremendous love for me, I

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<sup>90</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 6.

<sup>91</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 58–59.

<sup>92</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 28, 75, 76, 92.



am empowered to offer that love back to God and to my neighbor.<sup>93</sup> This dynamic appears clearly in the ministry of ISP. The facilitators typically come to ISP out of a desire to serve, and in doing so they find themselves transformed. Retreatants arrive looking for self-transformation, and many leave with a great desire to work with others.

Many others return to give back through volunteer work with ISP and other organizations. Further, through this movement outward,

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*Ennis Adams writes, "once, I was ashamed of my story, but now I am happy to let God work through me and share it with others."*

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many retreatants see their perspectives on their own stories transformed. Instead of something uniformly awful and regrettable, they see how God can work through it, and through them, to reach out to others. On

this note, and with characteristic directness, Ennis Adams writes, "once, I was ashamed of my story, but now I am happy to let God work through me and share it with others."<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Tina Morrow expands on how she has lived out this insight in her own life:

Another big realization on that retreat was that I can help others by sharing my story. My own story is one of the most powerful gifts God has given me to help others. By sharing my story I can give others hope that sobriety and recovery are possible for them, just like it has been for me. Trusting God and allowing Him to work through me is the key.<sup>95</sup>

Pain, suffering, shame, and isolation have been transformed into a means of healing—into something life-giving and community-building.

Addiction by its nature is focused on self-gratification to the exclusion of all else. Also, the experience of homelessness can force one to focus almost entirely on oneself, in the struggle each day simply to find food and shelter and to avoid potential problems that

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<sup>93</sup> *SpEx* 234.

<sup>94</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 48.



may arise in interactions with others on the street. People who come on ISP retreats, having seen the emptiness of their self-centered pursuits of addiction, are generally looking for something else, but they are not sure quite what. They are longing for connection—with God, and with other people—to take them out of that prison of isolation in which they feel trapped. A healthy love of self, grounded in a deeper awareness of God’s own love, can lead them out of that prison. The experience of God’s personal love is the groundwork upon which other graces can and will build—notably, that desire to love and serve God and others which leads out of the imprisonment of self-centeredness.

Many ISP retreatants attest to this movement. Bill Little explicitly articulates the connection between proper self-love and love of others:

It was on the retreat that I learned how to love myself. I also learned how to love other people again. If I didn’t care about myself, why should I care about you? Before, I wouldn’t give you the shirt off my back. But now, if you need my shirt I’d be the first one to give it to you, because I’ve got more respect for other people.<sup>96</sup>

After the retreat, Amanda Asque writes that she started caring for her elderly grandmother, something she never would have considered before.<sup>97</sup> And Issac Sneed speaks of the “self-seeking values” he had held earlier in his life, contrasting those with his newfound ability to share with and teach others.<sup>98</sup> In his unfiltered way, Danny Prowell tell us that “for 50 years I had no feelings. I would take your wallet, take your shoes, I would take you, with no problem. I’m different now, I have compassion for people.”<sup>99</sup> Many former ISP retreatants, including almost all of those whose stories are found in *Stories of Hope*, devote a considerable amount of time and energy to volunteer work, both with ISP itself and other programs, “go[ing] back to give

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<sup>96</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 38.

<sup>97</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 65.

<sup>99</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 72.

back.”<sup>100</sup> As Ennis Adams writes, “I have been transformed and I am now able to help others who are ready to give up on themselves.”<sup>101</sup>

A virtuous cycle is thus initiated, as recognized by the Twelfth Step of AA, which directs members to carry the message to others. However, the essence of this step does not consist primarily in goodwill—in “paying forward” a debt for the help that one has received oneself. Rather, sharing the message with others so as to help them in their own journeys helps keep Twelve Step program members themselves sober. In other words, this movement outward to helping others itself facilitates the continued growth of the individual. As one retreatant put it, “helping others helps me, it helps me grow. I keep things by giving them away.”<sup>102</sup>

This movement will also be quickly recognized by those familiar with the incarnational character of Ignatian spirituality. As Ignatius wrote at the culmination of the *Exercises*, “love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than in words.”<sup>103</sup> While deeply concerned with the individual’s interiority, the overall dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises is directed outwards, toward mission, toward the building of God’s kingdom. In this vein, Bruce Meyer attests to the importance of this outward movement for the spiritual journey that he began on an ISP retreat: “what spirituality is all about to me now is being a whole person and willing to help other people.”<sup>104</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

**T**he three dynamics explored in this article—the movements from shame to acceptance, from isolation to community, and from community to reaching out to others—should be present in some way in the spiritual journey of all Christians. Each represents an import-

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<sup>100</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 31.

<sup>103</sup> *SpEx* 230.

<sup>104</sup> ISP, *Stories of Hope*, 100.

ant aspect of what it means to deepen and live out one's faith—a faith in which God loves each person uniquely and calls each to share that love with others. It should be amply clear that, in the context of ISP, these same dynamics appear among all participants, including both retreatants and facilitators. Still, they may stand out more sharply in the stories of retreatants, which are typically more dramatic.

Moreover, retreatants are often more willing to share from the depths of their vulnerability and more articulate in doing so. But all people—even those who have not experienced extreme poverty, homelessness, or the challenges of addiction—need to feel the unconditional love of God, to find community, and to serve others. As the church has experienced since its first opening to gentiles, this community is enriched by including people from outside one's normal circles—people one usually sees as *other*. The richness of such a community thus stands to transform its members.

Further, none of the dynamics described are movements that a person simply goes through once and for all—as when passing a driver's test. Rather, they all are areas in which every person needs continual reinforcement. In other words, there is always room to experience God's love for oneself more deeply, to give more of oneself to community, and to do more to reach out to those in need. Thus, whether one has been on countless retreats in the past or is just beginning to explore spirituality in an explicit way, an ISP retreat has the potential to move each participant deeply.

Finally, the ISP offers an excellent model for living the faith in a way that meets a need in our contemporary church to reach out to the materially poor. May it in turn inspire others to find new ways to reach across boundaries and build life-giving communities.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

Thank you for your essay, “Ten Things That St. Ignatius Never Said or Did” (Spring 2018). I have a question about Myth 10, “On Discovering One’s ‘Deepest Desires’” (pp. 39–42). You write, “Ignatius always follows *id quod volo et desidero* in the *Spiritual Exercises* by telling exercitants what the object of their desire *should* be” (p. 42, your italics). However, he also notes as a kind of governing principle that “the one giving the Exercises ought [ . . . ] to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord” (*SpEx* 15; Ganss 25–26). In this spirit, St. Paul explains that “God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work” (Ph 2:13 NABRE).

Considering these things, should not the one giving the Exercises strive primarily to help retreatants to discern and develop the desires that God is in fact working in them, rather than tell them which graces to request? On this point, I have found myself in situations where telling retreatants, as the first exercise directs, “to ask for shame and confusion” (*SpEx* 48; Ganss 41) about them-

selves probably would have derailed their retreats. Which does not necessarily mean to skip that or any other exercise; just to let God reveal what to ask in meditating on the proposed subject matter. You suggest this approach early in the essay (p. 3) but do not develop it in the Myth 10 section.

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Novitiate of St. Alberto Hurtado  
Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA

Fr. O’Brien:

Thank you for your thoughtful questions. A couple of considerations.

There is no contradiction between asserting, on the one hand, the existence of certain ideals to be acknowledged and desired, and on the other hand, that not every individual is in a position, emotionally, spiritually, or circumstantially, to attend to those ideals in the same way. In the Constitutions, for example, Ignatius clearly considers the proper criterion for discernment of God’s will to be whatever promotes the more universal good of souls—that is, a Jesuit *should* desire and seek that end—yet Ignatius also indicates three times that a Jesuit must discern that criteri-

on *caeteris paribus* ("all else being equal"), in light of his own gifts, limitations, and circumstances (*Const.* 622, 623, 734). Likewise, returning to your example, Ignatius can affirm that every Christian *should* desire remorse and compunction during the First Week, while understanding that not all retreatants will find this emphasis helpful at that particular time in their lives.<sup>1</sup> Ignatius again demonstrates this understanding when he informs candidates for the Society that they *should* desire to experience humiliations in Christ's service, but if they do not, can they at least desire the desire?<sup>2</sup>

Second, your use of the expression "governing principle" to describe Annotation 15 is consistent with much contemporary literature on the subject, but I suggest

that it goes beyond Ignatius's original intention. Truth be told, some writers put so much weight on Annotation 15 that they effectively make it a second Principle and Foundation for the *Spiritual Exercises*. Based on that "governing principle," they conclude that directors never should mention to exercitants anything that sounds like an ideal or a "should." Indeed, one renowned US Jesuit held this principle so strongly that, by his own admission, he refused to say anything at all to his exercitants, even when they were contemplating morally-questionable options!

But as I have contended elsewhere, there is a considerable difference between coercing retreatants into making a given choice and reminding them of certain ideals to keep in mind during their discernment.<sup>3</sup> Ignatius intended Annotation 15 as a practical warning to avoid the former, not a theological principle to forbid the latter.

Barton T. Geger, SJ (ucs)  
Editor

<sup>1</sup> A medieval principle, cited by Fr. Juan Polanco, captures this tension well: *quod enim simpliciter est melius, non univocum est melius est*: "what is the better thing considered abstractly is not the better thing for each individual" (*Monumenta Ignatiana. Exercitia spiritualia S. Ignatii de Loyola et eorum directoria [Exercitia]*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. [Madrid: 1919; Rome, 1969], II:311; trans. Martin E. Palmer, SJ, *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises: The Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the Official Directory of 1599* [St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996], 138). See also *Exercitia*, II:488; trans. Palmer, 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Const.* 102.

<sup>3</sup> Barton T. Geger, SJ, "The First First Companions: The Continuing Impact of the Men Who Left Ignatius," *SSJ* 44, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 32–37; "Bending the Knee to Baal: St. Ignatius on Jesuit Vocation Promotion," *SSJ* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 33–37.

Editor:

I have been reading with much profit your recent article, “Ten Things That St. Ignatius Never Said or Did” (Spring 2018). With regard to Myth 5, “On St. Ignatius Being a Layman” (pp. 24–26), you write, “in 1515, when Ignatius was twenty-four years old and six years before his conversion, he received tonsure—which, according to church law, made him a member of the minor clergy” (p. 24). But Enrique García Hernán, in his book *Ignacio de Loyola*, writes that Ignatius was tonsured at a much younger age—even as early as 1498: “una solución prudente fue tonsurar al joven Iñigo, y esta es la razón de que le hicieran clérigo a su corta edad. El límite eran entonces los siete años; por tanto, fue tonsurado en 1498.”<sup>4</sup> I’m wondering which of the two dates is more accurate.

*Paul Rolphy Pinto, SJ (GU)  
Pontifical Gregorian University  
Rome, Italy*

Fr. Rolphy Pinto:

Thanks to you and to Fr. Jack Izzo (UWE) for writing about the age of Iñigo’s tonsure. Your letters prompted me to investigate the

question more deeply, for which I am grateful.

Because canon law at the time required tonsure for clerics, and Ignatius appealed at least three times to his clerical status, we can infer that he received tonsure prior to making those appeals. But since we have no record of when he received tonsure, we can only make a guess, based on circumstantial evidence, as to that date. I took the age of twenty-four from author Paul Van Dyke, who claims that Iñigo received tonsure during a home-visit to Azpeitia; but he neither cites his source nor provides a warrant for his claim.<sup>5</sup> Now, my subsequent research suggests that most scholars think that Iñigo received tonsure when he was younger than twenty-four—some say at the age of about fourteen, but some more recent authors, including García Hernán, whom you cite, claim the age of seven.

Either way, to my relief, that does not contradict the point that I was trying to make in the Myth 5 section! Thanks again to you and to Fr. Izzo for the correction.

*Barton T. Geger, SJ (ucs)  
Editor*

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<sup>4</sup> Enrique García Hernán, *Ignacio de Loyola* (Tres Cantos: Editorial Taurus, 2013), 30.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Van Dyke, *Ignatius Loyola: The Founder of the Jesuits* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 20.

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