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Sanctuary - A Sacred Tradition

We made it through the first 100 days, and now through the second 100 days. The republic still stands. But it has been a rocky year for students, teachers, and administrators for all of our Jesuit universities and colleges.

At the core of a university is the search for truth. Whether it's theology exploring scripture ("Know the truth and the truth will set you free") or scientific research, the university treasures truth. It rejects or should reject "alternative facts." They are illusory. They are chimeras worthless for building a civilization and a just and lasting peace. The most insidious effect of President Trump's rhetoric is the damage done to language itself. In a telling analysis, Charles Blow identified its trademarks: "sophistry peppered with superlatives" and "a jumble of incomplete thoughts stitched together with arrogance and ignorance" (*The New York Times*, May 1, 2017). The degradation of language probably undercuts the university most because we educators are constantly refining, inventing, creating, naming, honing in on the best expressions to reveal the hearts of people and the heart of the world.

When the National Seminar board met at Georgetown last January to decide on the theme for this issue, we spent a highly unusual amount of time in discussion and discernment. Ultimately we decided to change course from a previously announced theme and to face head on into the headwinds assaulting the universities. Once we named the Jesuit university as a sanctuary for truth and justice, the topics and articles rolled out quickly. We realized too that this crucial theme flowed continuously from our January issue of *Difficult Conversations*. The methodology in that issue will serve us well for the theme of this Fall 2017 issue.

In fact, the keynote article by Fr. Bryan Massingale of Fordham, "The Ignatian Witness to Truth in a Climate of Injustice," which deals extensively with racism and creating a home for all, flows seamlessly from our Spring issue. We were happy to collaborate with the organizers of the triennial Jesuit justice conference, being held this year at Seattle University, August 10-13, where Father Massingale will be giving this address. You may hear his full address, as well as the other three keynoters, on our Website at <http://www.conversationsmagazine.org/>

We did not want to repeat the political cant of any particular party nor to get bogged down in the miasmatic swamp of analyzing all the mistruths and lies that have arisen with the ascension into office of the current president. Rather we wanted to encourage a dialogue based on the deepest spiritual traditions and the Ignatian dictum found in the guidelines for the Spiritual Exercises, #22. "It is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another's statement than to condemn it as false. If an orthodox construction cannot be put on a proposition, the one who made it should be asked how he understands it. If he is in error, he should be corrected with all kindness."

Fr. Howard Gray, S.J., of Georgetown masterfully takes us through the vital Ignatian elements for discerning our way through a time of "social imbalance and ethical ambiguity" and creating a "Sanctuary of the Heart." Some of the most poignant pieces in this issue are by undocumented students at our universities who share their dread and fear for themselves and especially for their families with remarkable courage.

Our goal is that the sacred tradition of sanctuary, which suggests a welcoming, inclusive, safe space, guided by spiritual traditions, may be a wellspring for creativity and depth in facing the current national crisis. As with any Ignatian discernment, our primary focus is on pursuing the good, rather than engaging evil; honesty, rather than dissembling; rational discourse, rather than ideological polemic.

A Jesuit sanctuary of higher education enables students to study, dialogue, and engage each other. It creates an arena for faculty to freely pursue truth with all the resources of the great wisdom traditions. And it urges all of us pursue the common good, that is, to engage in building a more just and humane society, guided by faith and informed by reason.

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