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### How I Caught the Spirit

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Christianity—more descriptive than prescriptive. That is, even as the Apostle Paul spoke of handing on (*paradidomi*) the traditions (*paradosis*) he had received about Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:23) and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3), so the mission of a university represents a commitment to “hand on” its vision of an education informed by faith. This way of thinking about the mission encourages both flexibility and stability.

While interpreting the mission either too narrowly or too widely can be equally detrimental to a university, those outside the Catholic tradition who teach at Catholic universities are especially concerned that the mission not become too prescriptive. Rigid and narrow interpretations of the mission, whether articulated by the institution or by special interest groups in the founding denomination, are contrary to the flexibility essential for both faith and learning. The impulse to restrict and control is destructive of the very element necessary for vital and healthy faith: change.

Though some would wish it otherwise, Cardinal

John Henry Newman, in his “Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1845),” knew that change and flexibility were at the heart of faith: “In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” Newman used the analogy of a flowing river. While it may be true that a stream is clearest near the spring, such an analogy cannot hold true for religious belief, “which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full... Its beginnings are no measure of its capabilities, nor of its scope. “Stable enough to assure continuity, but flexible enough to encourage growth.

When a university articulates its mission with that principle in mind, people of good will, including this Protestant theologian, will have contributions to make. ■

*Wilburn T. Stancil is professor of theology and religious studies at Rockhurst University.*

## HOW I CAUGHT THE SPIRIT

*Though Jesuit educated, I didn't care, until...*

By Timothy J. Cook

**M**y story about catching the spirit of Jesuit education may be a bit unusual. For me, the third time proved to be a charm. I am a product of a Jesuit College (John Carroll) and graduate school (Boston College), but I became an activist for Jesuit mission only in my third experience of Jesuit education, as a faculty member here at Creighton University.

I had worked for six years as a high school teacher and six more as a president/principal of a Catholic high school in Rhode Island. When I finished my doctorate in education and was ready to go to work at a university, I did not seek out a Jesuit school. My goal then was clear: I wanted to teach at a Catholic university. I am grateful that I landed at Creighton.

I came in 1996 and got involved in the usual round of faculty activities. By now, almost twelve years later, I go around promoting Creighton's Jesuit approach to education. To help you understand why and how, let me address four questions here: What's so special for me about Jesuit education? What do I see happening around me? How did I get so enthused about it? And what can we do better in the future?

What is special for me about Jesuit education is all those things suggested by our familiar slogans: finding God in all things, seeking the greater glory of God, exercising personal care for people, and asking constantly about the “more.” These are exciting things at the heart of our lives! I have learned to love Jesuit education because it is so humane and world-affirming. Life at

Creighton shows a profound respect for the intellect; it blends reason with faith in a way that I find engaging and confirming.

My interaction with students continues to infect me with Ignatian spirit. Many of them are really on fire with faith. Their idealism and energy get to me. They question me, and I need to rethink. It is invigorating to interact with them.

My favorite story about a student transformation concerns a Jewish undergraduate woman. During her time with us, she became deeply involved in campus ministry, particularly work for peace and justice. She came to Creighton as a social activist. She left Creighton with a deeper understanding of the faith that does justice. Her experience here helped her to become a better Jew. Being a part of an experience like that is exciting! It is worth championing!

What I see around me far too often is a tendency to

softpedal our Catholic and Jesuit mission for fear that people will find these religious values offputting. I experience exactly the opposite. The more we are "out there" with our Ignatian vision, the more students are drawn to participate and invest themselves. The Ignatian spirit is contagious! It is our best "selling" point in every sense of the word. I continue to be dumbfounded by people at our own institutions who do not promote exactly that aspect of what we have to offer. This kind of education is a "pearl of great price" that people will not find elsewhere. I am amazed at people who think that our being "Catholic" is somehow restrictive. I find life here both distinctive and freeing—freeing us to do even more than we might elsewhere.

How did I catch this spirit? I ask myself sometimes. These twelve years have seen me develop and change in ways I would not have expected before and that I cherish now as I continue to grow and to be challenged.



A student teacher tutors school children in the School of Education Literacy Lab in University Hall, Loyola Marymount University.

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African Studies Professor John Davis poses a question to his class, Loyola Marymount University.

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Being around people with this sense of vision was highly contagious for me. From Jesuits and others I picked up a strong sense of what we are about. I delved deeper into Ignatian spirituality in several ways. I am not sure I can now track which things came before which. I know that a key phase of my developing commitment was making a nineteenth annotation retreat. That opportunity and invitation came out of participating in a faculty seminar on Jesuit education.

People talked there about Ignatius' experience and their own retreat experiences. Fr. Larry Gillick, who interacted with us about the Spiritual Exercises, actually sought me out and encouraged me to make a retreat myself. As it happened, I was going on sabbatical the following semester. I am glad that I took Larry up on his offer! From there, regular spiritual direction was a natural next step for me. Being around people who are on fire with the Ignatian charism (or spirit) has certainly fanned the flames of my development. Good campus

liturgy and preaching have also challenged and sustained me.

What things should we be thinking about here? What should we do further than the things we are doing? We need to do more for people like me who have developed an interest in Ignatian education. Formation does not end after one year-long seminar. We need to create a developmental scheme for deepening the faith of people like me who have been infected with the Ignatian vision. For example, should we offer a regular faculty pilgrimage to Ignatian sites for those who have made the Exercises? I myself have already helped direct the faculty Ignatian seminar. I wanted to do that, since the seminar helped me so much. I will help anyone I can to catch the spirit of Jesuit education. ■

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