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From the Editor: Spiritual Exercises Bring Special Spirit to Campus

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From the Editor

Spiritual Exercises Bring Special Spirit to Campus

In *Conversations* 44, Fall 2013, I wrote my first page 1 introduction as the new editor. I had moved from *America* magazine in New York to a new mission as a translator and editor at the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis, right across Lindell Blvd. from St. Louis U. I wrote that it was great to be back at a campus, to sense the energy and excitement of a new school year, to feel the campus rhythms, to see the hope on many faces.

I have left that behind again. The Institute of Jesuit Sources, which translates and publishes basic Jesuit texts, has begun a new life at Boston College. And although I very much appreciated being part of it, I felt that I had done what I could for the project I was working on. So, with blessing from Jesuit superiors, I returned to New York and *America*, where great new things are happening.

This issue of *Conversations* features the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, the foundation of Jesuit spirituality and thus of the spirit that animates much of our mission in education. It is clear that these Exercises exert a growing influence over a lot of the college and university communities in explicit retreats based on them and in programs that seek to bring their dynamics to events and attitudes on campus and beyond. The Exercises make an impact on the teaching and the campus life of the Jesuits schools in many ways.

Some articles here take up specific aspects of the Exercises such as discernment; some show the impact on more defined areas like science of the arts; and some describe the long-term impact of the Exercises on individuals. We note too how the Exercises have something to offer a Buddhist or an atheist. Not every individual on every campus has experienced the Spiritual Exercises, but I think it is safe to say that every campus has felt their power. They provide a vocabulary, as many of the articles that appear here will show. And if that vocabulary can get stretched beyond strict definition, still it demonstrates a desire to enter into the spiritual core of who we are alone and together and provides a basis for understanding and – could we want more? – for conversation.

Before I moved from St. Louis to New York, I received permission to take a long drive and visit the places in the U.S. that are named after Jesuits. This project derived from my lifelong fascination with geography and maps. I limited my quest to cities and counties (Marquette, Wis. and Mich., and De Smet, S. Dk., for example) and geographic features (Pere Marquette River, Lake Charlevoix, Mount Roothan, among many others). To include parks, streets, and schools would have kept me behind the wheel for a decade or more. And though they did

not strictly fit my definition, I visited 10 of the 11 Jesuit U.S. colleges and universities named for Jesuits. (The one I missed I had already visited recently.) I also passed by Xavier U. in New Orleans and Bellarmine U. in Louisville but missed St. Xavier near Chicago; these three are not Jesuit schools, of course.

These campus visits impressed on me once again the variety of the schools. Some are in the central city, others in outlying areas or suburbs. Some are spread out over many acres, others are more concentrated. But in all of their variety they pursue a common mission, and that mission finds its historic roots and its present heart in the spiritual heritage of St. Ignatius, particularly in his Spiritual Exercises.

And all of these schools make an impact on the local community beyond the campus. Sometimes this means simply street names – Loyola Avenue, Rockhurst Road. Sometimes it is a bit wider – Loyola Park and Loyola Beach or strip malls, pizza shops, and gas stations that bear the name of their nearby Jesuit school. But schools often have major impact on their communities in church life, neighborhood identity, and the local economy.

I saw the value of an engaged campus when I returned from my road trip and began packing up for my move. St. Louis had been making national news over the shooting death of Michael Brown and was awaiting the grand jury decision on indicting the police officer involved. The SLU campus was witnessing an occupy movement that took over the central clock tower and its surroundings. President Fred Pestello entered into conversations and resolved this crisis, urging the community to dig deeper into the causes of the “mire of chronic, systemic injustice” that many experience and saw here an opportunity to move forward. In the larger community, SLU professor of criminology and criminal justice Dr. Norman White was an articulate voice for justice and reason, and other faculty worked to help the situation. So too did students, including young Jesuits studying philosophy at SLU who joined efforts to address the anger and frustrations; among them Louie Hotop and Matt Wooters, who host a regular radio broadcast, “In Other News,” were at the clock tower and at Ferguson.

Our schools are about education, and that goes beyond classes and papers. Our schools are about spirit, and that goes beyond cheering for basketball or praying to pass a tough course. Our schools are about exercises of many kinds – academic exercises, physical exercises and, as our authors demonstrate here, Spiritual Exercises in a host of helpful ways. ■

Edward W. Schmidt, S.J., editor