



Whether it's exploring spirituality, sharing a pint at the pub, or plunging into service projects, these young adults all have a...

JESUIT CONNECTION

by Alice Poltorick

ELIZABETH DONAHUE is a 2005 alum of Boston College, where she “did a lot of Ignatian things,” including retreats and service projects. She’s Jesuit connected and in graduate school. How does she keep in touch with things Ignatian?

The answer is the Jesuit Connection, an organization aimed at young adults like Elizabeth that dates to 2006. That’s when graduates from the College of the Holy Cross met with staffers of the Jesuits’ New England Province, including provincial Fr. Thomas Regan, SJ, and advancement director Grace Regan. The young adults, in the post-college world, spoke of missing their connection with Jesuits—liturgies, homilies, retreats—and their desire to continue to meet others to foster their Ignatian spirituality, to keep up their commitment to service, and to have fun!

Staying rooted

Fr. Regan put it this way in a *Boston College Chronicle* article: “Given the real and genuine sense of being a part of something larger than themselves that many experience in a Jesu-

it school, retreat, or parish setting, the New England Province thought that it was important to create opportunities that would enable young alumni/ae from all Jesuit institutions to stay rooted, socially, psychologically, and certainly spiritually.”

The Jesuit Connection, a formation outreach to young adults, aims to provide Jesuit spirituality throughout all stages of life. It suggests that the connection to the Jesuits doesn’t stop at graduation or after a retreat. Jesuit teachings remain with students forever, and an ongoing pastoral relationship can continue to enrich one’s life and community beyond academia or a retreat house.

A spark was ignited that continues to inspire and engage young adults. Starting with a small circle of 30 friends, the Jesuit Connection has grown to a network of close to 400 young adults interested in faith, friendship, and social justice.

The circle now includes young adults from all over the country who have settled in the Boston area—former Jesuit Volunteer Corps members and alumni from Georgetown, Loyola University New Orleans, and Saint Louis University, to name a few of the Jesuit connections.

Jesuit high school and college students learn about Ignatian spirituality through retreats, service trips, and classes, but how to maintain that connection after graduation? Boston-area alumni came up with the Jesuit Connection. Close to 400 strong now, they meet for liturgy, service, and fellowship. John Mulcahy, Rosemary Maffei, and Beth Sayers chat with Fr. John Wronski, SJ, after Mass.

“The Jesuits played an integral role in my spiritual formation throughout college and law school,” wrote attorney Pat Hurley, a graduate of Georgetown and Boston College law, on Jesuit Connection’s web site (see below). “I’m interested in keeping the Society and Ignatian spirituality alive in my post-graduate life,” he continues. “The Jesuit Connection provides that opportunity. It also allows for young adults to meet new people who have similar faith backgrounds and formation.”

Expanding universe

In 2008, nine young adults formed a leadership council to assist with the growing interest in the Jesuit Connection. Hurley and Michael Mahoney, a Holy Cross grad who works in marketing for shoe manufacturer Rockport, are co-chairs of the group, which meets during the summer to focus on the core of its mission: planning opportunities for worship, informal discussions and reflections, service work, and socializing.

The group uses e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter as well as



Jesuit Connection members gathered at the Jesuits’ Eastern Point Retreat House, about an hour north of Boston, for some clean-up and fix-up. They’ve also helped out at the Jesuits’ Nativity School in Worcester and at a food pantry, among other places, and they also make time for socializing.

plain old word of mouth to broadcast events. Liturgies, faith sharing groups, and weekend retreats give Jesuit Connection’s members opportunities to deepen their spirituality and relationship with God. Mass often opens seasonal events.

During Advent, small groups gather weekly to pray and reflect upon Scripture and share their experiences of preparing for Christ. “Brushing Up Against God in Daily Life,” a Kairos-style weekend retreat this past spring, received rave reviews—“Excellent retreat with a great theme at a beautiful location” and “There was a great deal of free time; for busy people this was perfect,” are how two survey responses read.

“Pizza and a Pint and Ignatian Conversation” provides

young adults with opportunities to learn about Ignatian spirituality and enjoy conversation and refreshments in an informal setting. Topics for the meetings are varied and diverse. At one meeting, Fr. Monty Williams, SJ, spoke about contemporary films as a way of demonstrating that Ignatian spirituality can be found in our everyday lives, including movies. At another, Fr. Ron Mercier, SJ, led a discussion on ethics in the workplace and responded to participants’ questions based on their personal experiences. Another time, Fr. Jim Hederman, SJ, led a session on Ignatian meditation based on the Spiritual Exercises.

Service at the heart of mission

Jesuit Connection members also get involved in many service projects. During a service day at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, they moved rocks, cleaned the paths to the outdoor Stations of the Cross, and raked the retreat house’s labyrinth. At Nativity School in Worcester, the group helped students prepare a meal, which was taken and served at The Mustard Seed, a food pantry. Some Jesuit Connection members provide service and companionship for older and infirm Jesuits at Campion Health Center in Weston.

After projects, attendees often convene at a restaurant or pub for plain old socializing and conversation.

Welcome

The Jesuit Connection welcomes all young adults—graduates of Jesuit schools and those who have had other experiences with Ignatian spirituality and values. Newcomers are always welcome, and transplants to New England are encouraged to attend. The only requirement is a desire to connect with others who are interested in spiritual, social, and service events.

Crista Carrick Mahoney, one of Jesuit Connection’s founders, is a Holy Cross grad who also taught at Nativity Prep in Boston and Cristo Rey in Cambridge and received an M.Div. from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry last spring.

“Jesuit Connection is a chance to reconnect with the Jesuit ideals and principles that were so formative in college,” she says. “It’s a chance to spend great time with like-minded young people who are living out these values in many different ways.”

Alice Poltorick is the director of communications for the Jesuits’ New England Province. She has an MBA from Boston College and is a member of St. Ignatius Parish in Chestnut Hill, Mass., where she is active in social outreach ministries.



For a schedule of upcoming events and more information visit:

www.sjnen.org/JesuitConnection