

What Makes a Jesuit High School Jesuit?

by Grace Regan

Jesuit high schools are well-known for providing students with a rigorous academic liberal arts education. There is a commitment to excellence. What other characteristics make education at a Jesuit high school unique? Meg Florentine, Provincial Assistant for middle and secondary education, and the teams for Mission and Identity and Campus Ministry at Boston College High School, Cheverus High School and Fairfield Prep, identified prayer and reflection, a strong religious education program, retreats and service and *cura personalis* as important components of Jesuit and Catholic school identity.



"The three New England Jesuit high schools share a common vision and mission for the students, faculty and staff and the greater school community, by providing a well-rounded program of intellectual rigor combined with a diverse program of activities and an invitation to prayer and reflection aimed at the formation of character and the promotion of a faith that does justice. While the three high schools share similar programming and philosophy, there are nuances to each of the programs." ~ Meg Florentine on Mission and Identity in Jesuit high schools

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"By accepting the invitation of St. Ignatius Loyola to labor beneath the banner of the Cross for the good of others, Jesuit schools effectively promote Jesus Christ's justice and love for all people. We pledge our readiness to work with our partners in marshalling the resources necessary to bring the message of the Gospel to future generations through Jesuit education."

~ Jesuit Conference, 2006. www.jesuit.org

An Invitation to Worship

Campus Ministry provides a variety of invitations to worship. Each of the New England Jesuit high schools gathers for worship at significant points during the year. The Mass of the Holy Spirit opens the school year for students, faculty and staff. During the week, each of the schools offers daily Mass and opportunities for reflection. At Cheverus, the students pray the Jesuit Examen as a community. The bell tolls and schools stop for the entire community to pause and give thanks. Each of the schools has a liturgy committee which consists of students and faculty and involves music ministry, prayer and programming.



BC High students on a Kairos retreat

Retreats

Every first-year student is introduced to the concept of retreat. Each of the high-school retreat programs involves a four-year program with a focus on the Kairos experience in the junior or senior year. Students in their first year are invited to understand Ignatian spirituality with a guided meditation involving scripture. For sophomores, the Examen and the process of discernment are introduced in retreat. For juniors and seniors, the Kairos experience is a special opportunity. Cheverus also offers a social justice retreat option for juniors who may want to make the Kairos retreat as seniors. All of the retreat programs have an intentional focus to help students understand the Ignatian ways of proceeding with the Spiritual Exercises

and the Examen as part of the discernment process.

At Fairfield Prep, students are invited to participate in a summer leadership program. Student leaders are identified and invited to understand what it is to be a Christian leader. The campus ministry team views the term Christian as a noun, an adjective and a verb. Their goal is to help the students view being a Christian leader as an action verb and to integrate that approach into every role in their day-to-day lives. It is a call to servant leadership. At Boston College High School, there is a focus on mentoring. The training process for student mentors involves intentionality and a process of witness. The students are encouraged to see God in each other and there is a peer-to-peer witness.



Cheverus students at Habitat for Humanity

Service and Justice

Being men and women for others is what students, faculty and staff are called to by this invitation to live a faith that does justice. Cheverus has been involved with Habitat for Humanity and the community has built seven houses in the Portland area. At Boston College High School, students are involved in service within the school by working with the Key Society and the mite box collection program. Students are also invited to participate in service projects and immersion programs. Fairfield Prep participates with other Jesuit schools at the Ignatian Family Teach-In and by annually remembering the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador

and their co-workers. Again, there is an intentionality to help students understand that they are called to be men and women for others and to find God in all things. The various opportunities for faith in action concretize the call to citizenship and servant leadership.

Kairos

"Kairos definitely changed my life. It has reshaped the way I look at the world and others." Jay Gobeil (Cheverus senior)

The Kairos retreat is offered to juniors and seniors on a voluntary basis at all three Jesuit high schools. Kairos is described on the Cheverus website as meaning "the best time, the Lord's time. The hope is that this four-day spiritual experience leads to a deepening of friendship and a closer relationship with God." Fr. Jim Hederman, SJ, Director of Campus Ministry at Boston College High School, describes Kairos as the closest thing to a predictable conversion moment for students who participate. The Kairos retreat model has been a unifying program for Jesuit high schools. Students leave the experience transformed and they are encouraged to *live the fourth*, which is the fourth and final day of the experience.

Cura Personalis

Each school pays special attention to the faith formation or the *cura personalis* of the faculty and staff. The Latin term *cura personalis* is a Jesuit ideal and it is defined as "care for the whole person." Fr. Bob Levens, SJ, is the chaplain to the faculty at Fairfield Prep. Fr. Levens' work involves faculty staff retreats, family Masses, spiritual direction and reading and discussion groups. Fr. Levens believes, *"that the program is evolving in partnership with the faculty and staff."* Boston College High School provides a book-end orientation and retreat for new faculty to introduce them to BC High and the Jesuit mission and Catholic identity. The program at BC High

is a collaboration of the Mission and Identity office and the Jesuit community. Fr. Ron Perry, SJ, and Michael McGonagle, Vice Principal of Mission and Identity, work together in the formation of adults. At Cheverus, Fr. John Predmore, SJ, provides spiritual direction, retreats and liturgy for faculty and staff. Faculty and staff participate in liturgy committees, diversity programs, as retreat and service and immersion trip leaders, mentors and in every aspect of worship. John Predmore describes his work with the faculty and staff, *"Adult formation in our schools is a process of bridge building – a way of connecting the hopes and despairs of one's inner life to the person of Jesus. Watching a person recognize that Jesus cares for him or her is remarkable. Suddenly, the Church becomes alive to them in a vibrant way."*

A Faith that does Justice

The three New England Jesuit high schools are committed to a Faith that does Justice as a school community. This is where the entire community comes together as men and women for, and with, others.



For more about the offices of Mission and Identity, Service Programs or Campus

Ministry, please visit: www.bchigh.edu; www.cheverus.org; www.prep.fairfield.edu

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