

The First and Most Important Novitiate Experiment: *The Spiritual Exercises*

by Fr. Joseph E. Lingan, SJ



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This past January, the six novices of the Maryland, New England and New York Provinces made the *Spiritual Exercises* at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Massachusetts. They were joined by the 12 Jesuit novices from the Chicago, Detroit and Wisconsin Provinces.

As novice director, directing the Exercises is the highlight of my year! While directing the Exercises, one comes to know the novice well, and is privileged to witness up close his relationship with God. An authentic experience of the Exercises is both personal and intense. Through the experience of directing novices, my own relationship with and affection for God has deepened, my appreciation and affection for St. Ignatius has deepened, and my appreciation and affection for each of our novices has deepened. I have certainly come to better know and appreciate the *Spiritual Exercises*, and I pray that I have become a better Jesuit in the process.

At the novitiate, we regularly remember and pray for our benefactors and their intentions. We are keenly aware that our mission at the novitiate is made possible through the generous prayerful and material support of our benefactors. I pray they know how grateful we are for their support of this important mission, and that God will continue to bless them with a generous spirit.

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Jesuit novices James Ferus, Marco Rodriguez, Chris Grodecki, Andrew Otto, Gil Stockson, and Adam Rosinski on retreat at Eastern Point Retreat House.



New England Province novice Stev Metika, nSJ, on the left, made the "Long Retreat" this spring in Alexandria, Egypt. The photo was taken at Sainte-Famille in Cairo.

Novitiate

For many religious orders the first stage of formation is called the novitiate. For the Society of Jesus, the novitiate is a two-year period of time during which the vocation of a novice is discerned and confirmed. The Society's guidelines state that "[a] vocation is to be tested by various experiments that, in St. Ignatius' view, constitute the specific characteristic of the novitiate; these must place the novices in circumstances wherein they can give evidence of what they really are and show how they have made their own the spiritual attitudes proper to our vocation." Today, our novitiate program is guided by these norms originally established by St. Ignatius and the early members of the Society of Jesus.

Most important among these experiments is the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola. The Exercises are a thirty-day series of prayer experiences or "exercises" that one prays. To express it simply, the Exercises are an instrument by which a person is able to meet God and to discern what might be God's will for the individual. The Exercises are an opportunity for one to begin to establish a deeper and more sincere relationship with God. The making of the *Spiritual Exercises* is the key experiment of the Jesuit novitiate, for it sets the tone or context for every other novitiate experiment that follows.



Early edition of the *Spiritual Exercises* by St. Ignatius Loyola.