



The O'Kane sons Conor, Greg and Andy at Boston College's Pops on the Heights in September 2007; Bernie and Patty at the lake.



Ignatian Spirituality as a Family Value

by Bernie O'Kane

Over the years, our family has encountered many men and women who live the Ignatian charism. They lead lives that see and seek the goodness in others; it is often an intentional way of being. The process of writing this article has given me the opportunity to reflect on the many individuals and experiences throughout our family's lives that have gifted us with Ignatian spirituality.

Guided by the Spirit

Several years ago for a seminar I wrote: "My granduncle and namesake, a priest in the Boston Archdiocese called immediately following my graduation from high school and subsequently from college inquiring if I had yet 'heard the call' to study for the priesthood. On each occasion, I politely answered the question in the negative, but the idea always intrigued me. Years later and with a full family life, I do not question the life path I undertook as I realize that the Holy Spirit was indeed guiding my vocation as I moved in the direction of parenthood and a career in higher education." Perhaps St. Ignatius has had a part to play in this process himself.

The commencement ceremonies in May 2009 will mark the 100th anniversary of my granduncle's graduation from Boston College. Although I do not often mention this fact, I realize that in one form or another, the Jesuits and Ignatian spirituality have been a significant part of our family's life as far as anyone can remember.

Jesuit Educated

All three of our sons have joined my wife and me as graduates of Boston College. Indeed, each of our sons is also a graduate of BC High, where they developed both their minds and their hearts. In 2006 and 2005, respectively,

our son Conor and I each completed the MA program in pastoral ministry at Boston College's Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry now part of the School of Theology and Ministry.

When my wife and I matriculated in the late sixties our course work was heavy with theology and philosophy. At the outset, it seemed our studies lacked connection to the world around us. Yet, this was the time of the Vietnam War and its subsequent protests as well as a time of racial strife in Boston and across the nation. Over the past 16 years, it seems that our sons' high school and college educations at Jesuit institutions have been consciously focused on linking their education and moral development with their worldview.

Ignatian Spirituality

My first exposure to Jesuits and Ignatian spirituality was in the Boston College classroom where I was at once thoroughly intimidated and fascinated. I witnessed academically accomplished men doing their best to bring out the best in their students. There was a passion, which I would later describe as a vocation, alive in the classroom and on the campus. Both Jesuits and those trained by Jesuits greatly influenced me early in my academic career and professional development.

Citing just a few of those who touched me and our family



over the span of 30-plus years brings forth names like Sandy Jenks, Fr. Ed Walsh, SJ, Arthur Doyle and many others.

Jesuit Colleagues

For over 15 years, my work in the student life area at BC brought us into contact with colleagues from many Jesuit institutions across the country. Through the Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Officers (JASPA), our professional association, collegial relationships grew into lasting friendships with Ed Heavey, SJ, Hank Durand, Andy Thon, SJ, Barbara Christ, and Tom Reynolds, to name just a few. More recently, through my work in human resources, in collaboration with John Murray, SJ, we have been able to offer Boston College employees a variety of programs grounded in Ignatian spirituality as well as being enriched by our relationships with the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) colleagues from across the country. This network of Ignatian men and women represents one of the strongest connections we have experienced with others and with God.

*What I have been given, I carry
and try to share in all that I do.
Everything is better when it is shared,
especially love.*

Experiences that have helped open us to the Ignatian spirit in our lives have taken many forms. We have been parishioners at St. Ignatius in Chestnut Hill (a Jesuit-staffed parish) for many years and have had the opportunity to serve that community in several capacities. My wife, Patty, and I have also been blessed to participate in many Ignatian retreats from weekends in Cohasset, marriage preparation workshops, married couples' retreats, and the 19th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises. In 2005, Patty and I with our son, Greg, facilitated a transformative undergraduate service immersion trip to Jamaica. In addition, through the generosity of Skipp Conlan, SJ, and Bill Barry, SJ, I have been given the opportunity of being trained as a spiritual companion, accompanying both busy staff and students on their spiritual journeys.

Family Values

Over the years, our sons have benefited from personal experiences from volunteerism and retreats to the development of effective communication skills through exposure to theater. Our eldest, Conor, graduated with a double major of theology and theater and volunteered for two years with Jesuit Volunteers International (JVI)



Conor and his dad in Belize.

in Belize, Central America. His commitment to living the values of community, simplicity, social justice, and spirituality—the basic tenets of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps—seemed a natural outgrowth of his education and volunteer experiences at

BC. Conor currently serves as associate director of campus ministry at Fairfield University. Andrew and Gregory, respectively, film and theater majors, currently seek ways to express their passion of reaching out to others through performance in New York City—each giving voice to God's love through his interaction with others.

In October 2008, the Jesuit Collaborative hosted a meeting of Jesuit and lay persons interested “in deepening their spiritual lives and being of greater service to God and neighbor ...” Both Conor and I participated as representatives of our respective institutions. To my surprise, several participants commented that they were thrilled to see the Ignatian spirit at work through different generations. Our family, as do many others, feels blessed to have been touched by the spirit of Ignatius and continues to pray that we “hear the call” as we receive God's love through others. Following his service in JVI, Conor seems to have summed up the impact of Ignatian spirituality on our family, writing, “I (now) realize that it was God, through my family and close friends, who opened my heart. What I have been given I carry and try to share in all that I do. Everything is better when it is shared, especially love.”

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