

# Invited “Into Deep Water”

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Br. Christopher Derby, SJ



*The Jesuits at their tertianship center in Ireland.*

Early in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus teaches a crowd from a seat in Simon Peter’s boat. After Jesus finishes speaking, he says to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” This idea of “putting out into the deep” is critical to Tertianship, the final stage of Jesuit formation. St. Ignatius Loyola wanted his Jesuits to be tested over a long period of time, beginning with first probation, which happens in the early days of the Novitiate, leading through alternating periods of study and work, to a period of spiritual formation after theological study (and ordination, for priests) called Tertianship.

In September, I came to Ireland to be one of twelve tertians in the English-speaking European Tertianship, based at a Jesuit spirituality center on the shore of Dublin Bay. Tertianship recapitulates cer-

tain experiences a Jesuit has already had in novitiate, such as the *Spiritual Exercises* in their full 30-day form and an “experiment,” an apostolic “stretch” experience. The challenge for the tertian is to go deeper in these experiences, drawing on ten or more years of life and ministry as a Jesuit. Here I want to trace four key areas where tertians are invited to go “into deep water”: community life, the *Spiritual Exercises*, the apostolate, and the Jesuit Constitutions.

The twelve tertians and two instructors in our program come from eleven nations on four continents. Three of us are Brothers; the rest are priests. We have worked in education at all levels, in parishes and retreat centers, in vocation ministry, with Catholic young adults and with seminarians from other Christian faiths. This diversity reflects the charac-

ter of the Society; it also makes for some lively exchanges, not to mention hilarious contortions of the English language!

In the early months, we got to know one another and created a community of prayer, study, work and recreation. We exercised our talents and interests, from leading song at Mass to choosing films to watch together. We explored parts of Ireland together and cooked for one another on the weekends. We shared our cultures, too, saying grace before meals in our own languages, eating Cajun gumbo and drinking Brazilian *caipirinha*.

We discussed the situation of the Church and the Society in our provinces and countries, noting the challenges and the hopes that we have for Jesuit life all over the world. It has been eye-opening to learn about the differences in the experience of Jesuits formed in the post-Communist world of Eastern Europe and those amid the vibrancy of the Church in countries like Zimbabwe and Brazil.

The most important experience of the Tertianship is the 30-day retreat, which took place for us during Advent. In the month before, we each wrote a carefully structured autobiography. In prayer, we remembered and explored our family backgrounds, our relationships, our experiences of study and work, our path to a vocation in the Society, and our Jesuit lives. Each “chapter” of our autobiogra-



*Jesuits Manolo Hernandez, Christopher Derby and Grzegorz Jankowski at coffee break*



phy helped make us aware of God's action in our lives, how we had encountered his love and responded to him.

This autobiographical preparation formed the background against which the weeks of prayer in the *Spiritual Exercises* unfolded. In the *Exercises*, we each renewed our experience of the call of Christ to join in humble labor with him for the sake of the Kingdom of God. As we had a decade or more ago, we made an election, a choice, to follow Christ as freely and wholeheartedly as we can, with the help of God's grace. We made that choice in the midst of praying through the mysteries of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

After a break to celebrate Christmas together, we scattered throughout Europe and beyond to undertake our "long

experiment," a ten-week placement in an apostolic work chosen in concert with our instructors. My experiment took me to Corrymeela, an ecumenical peace and reconciliation center on the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland. There I joined volunteers from around the world in welcoming people engaged in all sorts of cross-cultural work, in Northern Ireland and beyond. I washed dishes, facilitated activities for young people, and organized reflection and worship for the volunteers and participants. I learned a great deal about the roots and persistence of the conflict in Northern Ireland and something about how conflict transformation and reconciliation take place.

An especially moving experience was working with a group of mothers and their children who had suffered domestic violence. The volunteer team facilitated a day-long experience for these families, creating a fairy-tale in which we all became characters, played games, and offered gentle touch experiences such as face-painting and hand massage. It was a privilege to listen as the families shared what the day meant to them. Corrymeela became for these children and their moms a place of respite, where they could enjoy each other's company and create a happy memory together.

A substantive part of our Tertianship has been our prayerful study of the foundational Jesuit documents, especially the Jesuit Constitutions and their Comple-

mentary Norms, the particular law of the Society of Jesus. As an activity, studying the Jesuit "laws" might sound dull, but it has proved to be anything but. In the words of Father André de Jaer, SJ, "the Constitutions 'define the identity of the Jesuit.'" If the *Spiritual Exercises* provide the Society of Jesus with its distinctive spirit, then the Constitutions form "a body for the spirit," to quote another Jesuit, Father Dominique Bertrand. Much of our work on these documents drew on our own experiences and reflections about Jesuit life, which we shared with one another. The text, in a sense, was as much our own Jesuit lives as the words of St. Ignatius.

Many times this year, I have had to explain what I am doing and what a tertian is. To me, after quite a long time as a Jesuit, Tertianship has been an opportunity to integrate lessons about my prayer, my vows, and my work as a Jesuit, and to prepare for the future. In the short term, hopefully I have prepared myself to profess my final vows as a Jesuit. Ultimately, I have been preparing for my life as a Jesuit, readying myself to "put out into deep water" as a Jesuit Brother working in the world.

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*Jesuits Christopher Derby and Lawrence Huck at Howth*

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