Deepening a Sense of Belonging:
Making Space for Religiously Unaffiliated Employees in Jesuit Higher Education

by

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Thesis-Project Abstract

The focus of this thesis project is those employees who do not identify with a religious tradition but by working in Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, make daily contributions to the mission. Through the exploration of this community, as well as those responsible for mission formation, one can glean the gifts of Jesuit education that are accessible for a broader audience, as well as craft a way of proceeding in the work of mission formation and animation that can benefit all employees. This project demonstrates that authentic encounter with the wisdom of the Jesuit educational mission, acknowledgement and celebration of the unique gifts these employees bring to mission work, and demonstration of both the relevance and benefit of mission to any work within a Jesuit institution, invite this population to a richer connection to mission. This connection to mission serves the well-being and growth of the employee, which in turn increases the well-being and health of the entire institution and its constituents.

Chapter One: Introduction

Within the first decade of the existence of the Society of Jesus, education had become a top priority. 475 years later, the Jesuits now educate over a million people yearly at approximately 2700 Jesuit schools across the globe. A hundred years ago, the schools were led and staffed by Jesuit priests and brothers, ensuring the passing on of Jesuit educational pedagogy and the unique approach of Ignatian spirituality. In the diversifying landscape of Catholic education to include more ministry roles for lay people, particularly women, the nature of how the foundational mission of Ignatius of Loyola is shared has shifted and adapted. Additionally, Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States have grown, become more complex, and begun attracting a broader spectrum of faculty and staff who seek employment at the schools for any number of reasons, but not always because it aligns with their religious identity. The impact of this shift is the need to consider what mission means for those that are not only not Catholic, but also religiously unaffiliated. This consideration necessitates exploration of how this population understands and lives mission while also including best practices of how to invite and share mission with those unfamiliar with Jesuit mission.

The focus of this thesis project is those employees who do not identify with a religious tradition but by working in Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States make daily contributions to the mission. Through the exploration of this community, as well as those responsible for mission formation, one can glean the gifts of Jesuit education that are accessible for a broader audience, as well as craft a way of proceeding

in the work of mission formation and animation that can benefit all employees. This project demonstrates that authentic encounter with the wisdom of the Jesuit educational mission, acknowledgement and celebration of the unique gifts these employees bring to mission work, and demonstration of both the relevance and benefit of mission to any work within a Jesuit institution, invite this population to a richer connection to mission. This connection to mission serves the well-being and growth of the employee, which in turn increases the well-being and health of the entire institution and its constituents.

Genesis

Throughout my life and ministry, I have felt like I've had one foot in two different and sometimes opposite worlds. Growing up, I found myself connected to different groups of my peers that did not always overlap, including those who were focused primarily on academics and those with a priority in athletics. As I experienced college and graduate school, I found myself deeply passionate about my theology studies and colleagues and yet equally comfortable with those who cared little for religion or theology, living lives mostly separate from religious institutions. I was inspired by my peers outside of religious traditions and their wisdom about and contributions to creating a world of peace. I opted to become Catholic at the same time the priest abuse scandal in Boston came to light. As someone who is horrified by the harm caused by the Church and also finds the rich spiritual wisdom within it, I am situated as someone who holds the tension of anger and connection to this tradition. Beyond the chaos of the priest abuse, I am a lay woman in ministry, aware of the dynamics I encounter due to my gender while representing an institution run by men. Some of these dynamics contribute to my feelings of comfort working with the churchgoers, but then more drawn to serving those that are

leaving and/or those who are spiritual but not religious. Through prayer and discernment, I see my background as a gift, viewing myself as a bridge-builder, a translator, and one who invites. I feel most alive when I am finding ways to make mission and spirituality matter to those who otherwise might dismiss the topics. It was bridge-builders and translators that invited me to encounter faith in a meaningful way and I hope I honored that in this project.

As most of my 20+ years of ministry have happened in Jesuit educational contexts, I often find myself representing the Ignatian tradition and Jesuit pedagogy that roots my places of employment and informs my own spirituality and approach to ministry and education. Having spent 17 years in Catholic Campus Ministry contexts, I often looked for ways to invite the angry, doubting, dismissive, or simply apathetic members of the student community to consider how any of this "religious stuff" could apply to their lived realities. When I discerned it was time to find a new ministerial role outside of what I had always done, I could not fathom a ministry not still rooted in education and the Jesuit tradition. Shortly after this, I accepted a position doing the work of mission formation with faculty and staff at Loyola University Chicago.

This work of mission integration is not limited to Jesuit institutions or my unique position, but is an emerging focus in schools, hospitals, and other Catholic apostolates. With decreasing numbers of Jesuits, Jesuit colleges and universities can no longer rely on priests alone to represent and promulgate the Jesuit mission. Lay colleagues committed to the authenticity and depth of the mission are necessary to the continuation of the Jesuit charism within their universities. That said, it is imperative that Jesuit institutions not only invite lay Catholic employees to learn, integrate, and animate this mission, but also

those unaffiliated with a religious tradition. Due to the number of institutions of higher education and the prestige of many Jesuit schools, individuals often seek faculty, staff, and administrative positions without having a particular connection to the Jesuit, Catholic foundation. Some of these individuals bring a resistance to Catholic institutions for fear of evangelization or how the school expects employees to represent the Church (even if they are not themselves Catholic). My experience is that many recognize the work of justice and peace-building Jesuits have historically done and currently do as their definition of mission. The research of this thesis project suggests there are creative ways to invite faculty and staff at Jesuit institutions to learn and participate in the authenticity of its mission, while also honoring and celebrating the ways that those outside the Catholic, Christian tradition actuate the mission as well. Creating space for employees to encounter and contribute to mission in ways that are both relevant and helpful to their actual work is compelling to people from any or no faith background. This foundation allows for exploration and the chance to build an even more intentional approach of mission formation for Jesuit institutions in the 21st century for all involved.

Methodology

Although initially unconscious, the undergirding methodology of this project emerged as the Examen of Consciousness of St. Ignatius of Loyola. While chapter two defines and discusses the importance of this form of prayer in greater depth, key elements of the Examen informed this project's research approach and are relevant in this introduction. The prayer begins with an invitation to awareness, openness, and freedom for what has been, both conscious and hidden. This project sought to bring awareness to the rich educational tradition of the Jesuits while also bringing to light the contributions

of religiously unaffiliated employees of these institutions perhaps previously unspoken or unknown. The spirit of freedom at the heart of the Examen also rooted this project, being open to discovering new ways of bringing mission to life, hearing both expected and unexpected challenges for this population, and engaging creatively with how Jesuit mission officers could proceed to be more inclusive of this population. The Examen invites one to name both the graces received and the challenges and brokenness encountered with that spirit of openness. One hope of this project is that both the gifts and the challenges of Jesuit educational mission for religiously unaffiliated employees are named, as well as the gifts and challenges of those trying to serve the institutions with this population. The final movement of an Examen is to consider what hopes one has for moving forward and what manner of proceeding will be most beneficial in these contexts. Chapter five mirrors that movement with a lens toward suggested strategies and concepts for a more inclusive understanding of who and how the Jesuit mission is demonstrated. As Ignatian spirituality begins with one's experience, this methodology begins in the experiences of those in the focus groups, but also directly comes from my own experience engaging with the Examen in my prayer life, my work, and in my facilitation of this prayer in group settings. While an awareness of this methodology came later in this process, it is a delight to recognize how deeply embedded this tradition already was and is in me.

This research was qualitative and rooted in the stories of those who do not identify with a religious tradition *and* work at a Jesuit, Catholic institution. There was commonality among participants in focus groups in that they each had a starting point of being committed to the mission of their institution. They were recommended by those

responsible for mission formation at their school and identified because someone else recognized their contributions to mission. The qualitative data collected also came from focus groups and interviews with those responsible for mission formation in Jesuit higher education, including university staff and administrators as well as representatives from the Society of Jesus whose work focus is Jesuit higher education. Both groups intentionally shared an overlap with the hope of creating opportunity to analyze and interpret common understandings between the two, as well as investigate divergent responses. The commonalities serve as the foundation for best practices in mission formation as they transcend religious identity. The differing responses helped name where disconnection could occur between these two populations that have a similar goal of mission integration. Naming the issues is necessary to begin working at dismantling them. Each method was rooted in the importance of storytelling, recognizing that the sharing of human experience contributes to meaning making and communal wisdom.

The focus on storytelling comes from a foundational concept in Ignatian spirituality is the importance of one's lived experience and how those experiences reveal who God is in the world in current times. If mission at Jesuit institutions is truly rooted in Ignatian spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises, a project about contemporary lived mission must be rooted in the lived experiences of those in these contexts. Hearing the joys and struggles of religiously unaffiliated employees as well as the successes and challenges of mission formation practitioners brought to light what is actually happening and also evoked opportunities for further development in mission formation. The other way mission is rooted in the Jesuit tradition is to be sponsored by the Society of Jesus in a formal capacity. With this comes the foundation and influence to define what "mission"

is at these schools. While some elements of mission are more familiar to its employees than others, there is a full ethos of what it means to be a Jesuit school. This project utilizes the rich tradition of Jesuit education to define and inform an authentic understanding of mission while also inviting wide contributions from everyone in these institutions.

As an Ignatian practical theologian, it is imperative to recognize the inherent beliefs and philosophical assumptions rooted in one's practice and research. These beliefs and assumptions begin the development of one's theory for deeper research. One of my theological convictions is, to paraphrase St. Ignatius of Loyola, "The Creator deals directly with the creature."[1] This informed my research, which necessitated an openness to hearing directly from individuals about their values, and specifically how their context informs those values and how they are lived practically. This project emerged from an epistemological assumption that honors the importance of context and intersectional identities, which was necessary due to the focus on one's religious identity (or lack of identity) within a community. My own values are interwoven into this research and have particular values-based language that informed how I engaged with interviews and focus groups, namely a specificity regarding the definition of mission in Jesuit educational contexts, a commitment to inclusive language and approach, and from a place of uplifting those who are religiously unaffiliated.

Given this project's argument, a variety of components of practical theology were part of the research. Those components included the need for an attentiveness of

[1] Michael Ivens, S.J., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster, England: Gracewing and Inigo Enterprises, 2016), 14.

complexity, the multidimensional dynamics of social location, and the ability to be open-ended and flexible.[2] This research begins in my foundational philosophical and theological commitments. First, this project assumed my belief in the God who interacts with the world in love and invites both individuals and communities to act within the God-created world. This God of love and relationship is also a God of experience and presence that welcomes all people to the work of co-laboring in the world while seeking a world of justice and peace. The other theological commitment I hold is the importance of an individual claiming their own unique role within the work of this God I espouse in the world today. This thesis project does not deal with Christian evangelization or proselytization for those not identifying as members of the Catholic community. The mission formation described is located in an educational setting, not a church. The hope is this project helps expand an acknowledgement of those who bring mission to life, beyond the assumption or belief that mission work is limited to Jesuits or those that identify as Catholic. A final assumption is that anyone with the desire and willingness to learn about the mission is able to participate, contribute to, and lead the work of mission within their respective places of employment.

Recognized Assumptions and Limitations

This thesis project began with the assumption that Jesuit education has a unique role and contribution to make in this current climate, and the mission undergirding this education can be meaningful and relevant not just for students, but also for those employed by the institution, regardless of one's religious identity. This thesis project also

[2] Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 2-4.

assumed that when employees of an educational institution are connected to the mission of the school in such a way that invites greater commitment and service, every member of the community will benefit, particularly the students. A final assumption is that religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities already make unique contributions to the mission that are valuable to the emerging tradition that is Jesuit higher education. By dialoguing with Ignatian spirituality texts, key documents of the Society of Jesus, and the lived experiences of various constituencies of employees at Jesuit schools, this thesis project speaks to this contemporary reality in a way to specifically contributes to mission formation of all employees.

Like all research projects, this thesis project had limitations. First, given the size and scope of this project, research was limited primarily to individuals who work at Jesuit institutions that self-identify as religiously unaffiliated.[3] These individuals chose to participate in mission programs or to deepen their understanding of what mission is/how it is realized during the course of their normal work activity. It does not represent the fullness of all those working at Jesuit institutions without religious affiliation, as it did not include those who are disconnected and/or antagonistic toward this topic. Secondly, there was not time nor necessary resources to fully explore this reality at all 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. There are eleven represented in this study. Thirdly, Jesuit education in the United States began in 1789 at Georgetown University. While the desire of this project was to include a diverse set of experiences and voices, and specific intention was made in focus groups and interviews to include the voices of

[3] While each participant in focus groups or interviews will use their own term to describe themselves, for consistency, the term "religiously unaffiliated" will refer to those who identify as spiritual but not religious, spiritual nones, or not religious. This area of identity is still emerging, and individuals maintain the right to which terminology feels most appropriate for themselves.

women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, the majority of written texts relevant to the history of this topic are written by Jesuits, more specifically white men. These authors have great insight to share in their writings, but there is a lack of written resources by marginalized identities included in this project. Because of this reality, I included diverse voices in the research of pedagogy and mission.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One: Introduction

This current chapter, chapter one, serves as the argument for why this thesis project is timely and needed in Jesuit education today. This includes the impact of declining numbers of clergy and religious as well as declining numbers of Catholics, while also acknowledging opportunities to impact retention and a sense of purpose in the workplace. This chapter establishes why and how the research methodology is utilized for this particular project. Finally, the introduction provides an integrated look at the structure of the chapters.

Chapter Two: Defining Mission in Jesuit Higher Education

Chapter two focuses on clearly defining what mission includes in the context of Jesuit higher education in the United States. Part of the challenge of Jesuit mission formation work is the inconsistency of how mission is presented or appropriated. This chapter mirrors an early step of the Examen, which is to look backward with the goal of naming what has been and currently is. The chapter establishes that Jesuit educational mission has been and continues to be expansive and nuanced, with many entry points, including but not limited to a deep spiritual understanding of self and the world, a

commitment to justice as recognition of God's work in the world, and a specific pedagogy for academic excellence. This chapter pulls from a wide swath of sources in an effort to honor the wisdom of different times in Jesuit educational history, as well as the wisdom of current practitioners that have adapted and found new relevance for this mission in today's culture and society. This chapter also names insights about access points within each part of mission for religiously unaffiliated employees. Finally, this chapter begins to name why mission matters for schools who are demographically less Catholic than they were 20 years ago. Naming the relevance of a Jesuit, Catholic mission for communities that are decreasingly Catholic confirms future opportunities for an institution internally and externally, expands the sense of inclusion and belonging for those who are not Catholic, and responds to the need of identifying what makes a university or college unique.

Chapter Three: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees in Jesuit Higher Education

Chapter three focuses specifically on those employees at Jesuit institutions that this thesis project hopes to learn about and serve more meaningfully. A core element of the Ignatian Examen is the freedom to uncover something new or emerging. This chapter broadens the defining of mission beyond insights of historical documents and practitioners by capturing the insights and narratives of those religiously unaffiliated employees that have found connection to the Jesuit mission of their school. Being open to critique, challenge, and brokenness in an effort to improve and respond to the call to greater love and compassion undergirds the importance of this population's sharing. Similar to the other groups gathered, there was intentional recruitment to seek out a diverse group of individuals for focus groups and interviews with regard to gender,

race/ethnicity, age, length of tenure at the school, and type of work the individual does. This chapter includes stories about how these individuals got connected to Jesuit education, what hooked them with regard to tradition, how they believe they animate the mission, and what challenges they encounter in that endeavor.

Chapter Four: Those Responsible for Mission Formation

This chapter shares the stories and insights gleaned from those who are responsible for mission formation. The focus groups and interviews included Mission Officers, Vice Presidents for Mission, staff whose positions focus on faculty and staff formation, and partners within the Jesuit provinces. These narratives include comparable questions as the previous chapter, including how these individuals got connected to Jesuit education and mission, how they view the purpose of their work, and their experiences of supporting employees that are religiously unaffiliated.

Chapter Five: Key Findings and Suggested Ways of Proceeding

Chapter five summarizes and concludes the other chapters by excavating key themes emerging from the research. This chapter utilizes the findings of the various sources, including the narratives from focus groups and interviews, specific documents from the Society of Jesus, and philosophical, theological, and sociological scholarly works to demonstrate the need and opportunity of the Ignatian vision in today's higher education environment. From there, it offers strategies and tactics for best practices in Jesuit higher education. These recommendations are specifically for mission formation practitioners in Jesuit higher education. While the implementation of these suggestions will garner additional questions about resources of time, energy, and positions, the hope is these suggestions give practical approaches that each institution can adapt to make

sense for their respective community. This chapter brings conclusion to the project in an analogous way that an Examen prayer would conclude. Having reflected, prayed, and contemplated, one is ready to both imagine a new way forward and put into action the plan that is created. Hope is at the root of this part of the Examen and the conclusion of the research of this project.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The conclusion of this project focuses on opportunities for further research and development, as well as naming new challenges that were unearthed due to this project's research and scope. Further, this chapter names the influence of this research within Jesuit higher education, as well as additional areas for broader ministerial impact in other areas, including other Catholic colleges and universities, secondary education, or in Catholic healthcare.

Invitation

With this structure and information in mind, one is invited to enter this project, aware of its intended goals. This project articulates and defines significant elements and components of the mission and spirituality of Jesuit institutions of learning relevant to higher education in the 21st century, centers the voices of religiously unaffiliated employees by demonstrating a variety of ways they contribute to mission and articulating the circumstances necessary to encourage these contributions, and finally recommends strategies and tactics to aid those looking to build bridges with this population at Jesuit colleges and universities. As this project argues, the mission of Jesuit education has a wide range of access points for relevance and interest. In this spirit, readers are encouraged to approach this research project through whatever access point is most

meaningful to them. For those seeking an entry point to all things Jesuit, begin with chapter two. If one is primarily concerned with hearing the narratives of those who are religiously unaffiliated, chapter three is a starting point. A reader can jump into chapter four with an interest in hearing about the role and experiences of those in mission formation. If all of the above is already familiar, chapter five's focus on key themes and a methodology for future mission formation is the way to proceed. Each reader is unique, and the hope is this project can respond to the needs of more than one population and inspire new understanding and compassion within this work of mission animation in Jesuit higher education in the United States.

Chapter Two: Defining Mission in Jesuit Higher Education

Introduction

In considering the complex and multi-faceted nature of Ignatian spirituality and rich historical tradition of Jesuit education at many educational levels, defining Jesuit mission in the context of U.S. higher education is imperative and complicated. As the Examen invites one to first identify and acknowledge what is and what has been, this project begins by determining and naming the foundational elements of this work. Jesuit mission contains many entry points that includes but is not limited to a deep spiritual understanding of self and the world, a commitment to justice as recognition of God's work in the world, and a commitment to excellence academically alongside a particular pedagogy for educational contexts. Or as Michael Tunney, S.J., Provincial Assistant for Higher Education for the East Coast Province more simply put, "The three general areas for mission are obviously academics, commitment to service, and the faith dimension."[4] This mission is seen in a three-fold approach of Ignatian thinking that honors the primacy of experience, context, and relationships. Each of the above areas of mission will demonstrate the relevance of this three-fold approach.

Defining Jesuit mission involves utilizing a variety of source categories in an effort to honor the wisdom of different times in Jesuit educational history, as well as the wisdom of current practitioners that have adapted and found new relevance for this ministry in today's culture and society. While a great deal of these sources will be members of the Society of Jesus and thereby ordained men, intentional effort has been

[4] Michael Tunney, S.J., Personal Interview with author, June 19, 2023.

made to include the voices of women and other lay individuals. Part of the challenge of Jesuit education mission formation work is the myriad of ways with who and how mission is presented and appropriated. This chapter will seek to provide authentic context for Jesuit terminology and jargon that get used frequently and sometimes without a greater depth of their origins and context. Finally, this chapter will begin to name why mission matters for Jesuit institutions of higher education, specifically looking at the need for identifying what makes certain schools unique and how the mission brings positive value to those within its community.

The dynamic and diverse understanding of mission contributes to the complexity of trying to define what Jesuit higher education is about. On one hand, the purpose of Jesuit education begins in the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, namely that "the human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God, our Lord, and by doing so save his or her soul."[5] On the other hand, the audience, approach, and understanding of the purpose of Jesuit education has shifted, changed, and grown throughout history. Two significant 20th century documents contributed to the tensions and complexity of Jesuit education, namely the Land O'Lakes "Statement on the Nature of a Contemporary Catholic University" in 1967 and the 1990 papal document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae.* The former is known for its "clear emphasis on academic freedom, modernization, and independence from church authorities."[6] This statement allowed for greater roles of the laity in positions of influence and leadership, as well as creating a broader sense of inclusion. Jesuit education embraced this exhortation as a moment to

[5] Ivens, S.J. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 29.
[6] Stephanie Russell, "Next Steps in Jesuit Education," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 46, no. 4 (September 2014): 6.

deepen a sense of academic excellence, as well as to meaningfully respond to the current cultural challenges (the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, etc.). The latter, penned by Pope John Paul II, swung the pendulum back to a more traditionally Catholic understanding, with the hope of "repair[ing] what the pope identified as a disconnection between the intellectual and religious identities of Catholic universities and to reaffirm the necessity of both institutional and personal fidelity to the teaching authority of the Church."[7] Jesuit universities had to determine a way of proceeding that maintained the gifts of the Land O'Lakes approach while responding to the concerns of Rome. This tension impacts an approach to mission formation as well as answering the question of who is able to participate and adopt the charism of the Society of Jesus.

The mission of Jesuit education can be defined semantically, but the lived expression of mission has and will continue to adapt and change according to the time, context, and individuals involved. According to Rita Dollard-O'Malley, Associate Provincial Assistant for Ignatian Spirituality for the Midwest Province of the Jesuits, "Mission has to be a living thing. It's something we point to, something that we desire, and something that is alive."[8] While some will be critical of the dynamism of this or the lack of certitude, others celebrate the possibility and, to use an Ignatian concept, freedom offered. This reality is mirrored in a passage from the Talmud in the Jewish tradition. According to the text, Moses saw God making edits to the Torah and was confused as to how the Torah was not already complete. God explained that future generations would find new understanding and wisdom beyond what Moses understood. Moses time travels

[7] Russell, "Next Steps," 7.
[8] Rita Dollard-O'Malley, Personal Interview with author, June 2, 2023.

to hear students studying the Torah, delighted in their honoring of the Torah (and of him), and heard God explain that even Moses did not get to understand the totality of the Torah.[9] Rabbi Kushner writes, "Every generation finds new meaning in the Torah. In trying to understand its teachings, we make ourselves better people."[10] Freedom is necessary to this availability for adaptation and difference. For those who desire adherence and uniformity, this will create tension. However, this ability to respond to an emerging future and an ever-increasing diversity within students and employees will contribute to the long-term success of Jesuit education in the 21st century.

With this context, this chapter will explore the three major areas of mission in Jesuit higher education, that of the spiritual wisdom of the Ignatian tradition, a commitment to a justice that recognizes God's work in the world, and the tradition of excellence and pedagogy in education itself. These three areas of mission will be explored in light of the Universal Apostolic Preferences, which will be explained later. Another thread woven into this chapter will be the accessibility of these areas of mission for those who are religiously unaffiliated, with a particular focus on how language and context can contribute to an invitational understanding of these concepts. The particularities of connection to religiously unaffiliated employees will be further highlighted in chapter three, through the stories and insights of this community, as well as in chapter five in an effort to suggest a methodology and way of proceeding for celebrating and inviting this community to see themselves as mission animators.

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[9] Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, *Jewish Spirituality*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 46-47.
[10] Kushner, *Jewish Spirituality*, 47.

The Spiritual Wisdom of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Spiritual Exercises

In the summer of 2019, the Father General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Arturo Sosa, S.J., released the priorities for the Jesuits for the next decade[11]. These priorities, called the Universal Apostolic Preferences or UAPs, are meant to inform and inspire the work of every Jesuit, lay collaborator, and apostolate into meaningful engagement with the needs of our current world. The first UAP is *Showing the Way to God: Show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and Discernment*. Pope Francis (a Jesuit himself) applauds this as the first preference, as it "presupposes as a primary condition the relationship of the Jesuit with the Lord, the personal and community life of prayer and discernment.[12]" While not everyone engaged in Jesuit higher education has a primary concern for a relationship with God, the priority of the spiritual life as a foundational reality lays the groundwork for defining Jesuit higher educational mission. The heart of Ignatian spirituality is the Spiritual Exercises, the spiritual classic Ignatius wrote down to reflect his own lived spiritual journey. The wisdom of the Exercises provides context for topics/buzz words like *cura personalis* (or care of the whole person), presupposition, discernment, the *Examen*, and a conversation about freedom in contrast to disordered attachment. Each of these access points to mission are rooted in an understanding of faith and connection to the Triune God, but also invite reflection and integration of one's lived experiences, context, and relationships for individuals more generally. In each of the next five sections, these concepts will be explored more fully, with a focus on how the

[11] "Introducing the Universal Apostolic Preferences," Australian Jesuits, Accessed December 12, 2023, https://jesuit.org.au/introducing-universal-apostolic-preferences/.
[12] Amedeo Lomonaco, "Pope commends Jesuits for being in tune with Church priorities," *Vatican News*, February 19, 2019, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-letter-jesuit-general-sosa-four-priorities.html.

tradition explains the concept, as well as opportunity for connection within each concept for religiously unaffiliated individuals.

Cura Personalis

Among the most cited elements of Ignatian spirituality in contemporary Jesuit education is the Latin phrase, *cura personalis*, or care for the whole person. While holistic education generally is seen as a best practice and utilized in both private and public higher education, the depth of this phrase invites something beyond simply managing the general needs of students. Fr. Barton Geger, S.J, now Assistant Professor in the School of Theology and ministry at Boston College, wrote about both the history of the phrase *cura personalis*, as well as its contemporary usage. He summarized the three modern usages of this idea to:

> Three definitions are typically given to *cura personalis* in the mission documents and promotional materials produced by Jesuit schools and Jesuit provinces in the United States. The first is holistic education that attends to the spiritual and moral dimensions of a person in addition to his or her intellectual development. Second, *cura personalis* denotes an education that is respectful of the unique needs and identity of each student. Finally, it can signify the duty of administrators and Jesuit superiors to show solicitude for individuals working in their institutions, in contradistinction to *cura apostolica*, which signifies their duty to show solicitude for the good of the institutions as a whole.[13]

In each of these understandings of *cura personalis*, those affiliated with this community are invited to care for others in complex and nuanced ways beyond mere kindness, making this distinctively Jesuit. In the first, the inclusion of spiritual and moral development distinguishes Jesuit education from, for example, a public institution. This is not to say that moral or spiritual development does not happen in public universities, but

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[13] Barton Geger, S.J., "*Cura Personalis*: Some Ignatian Inspirations," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 3, no. 2, (January 2014): 6.

that the inclusion of this human quality is an actual priority. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the 29th Superior General of the Society of Jesus, notably spoke that "The true measure of Jesuit education lies in who our students become."[14] Who the students, and ideally all those affiliated with Jesuit higher education, become will be a direct result of engaging and developing the moral, ethical, and spiritual imagination and practice. The hope is that an encounter of a Jesuit charism or ethos would invite that formation and invite greater commitment to the common good.

The second usage honors the uniqueness of each student (and ideally each employee) and the many experiences, identities, and values that contribute to who the person is. Each individual that joins a Jesuit school will do so uniquely and like nobody before them, because they themselves are a unique creation. This approach invites a rich openness as part of the care given, a way of detaching from assumptions or quick answers, an aspirational goal that asks more of caregivers. This approach is derived from the 15th annotation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which (paraphrased) is "The Creator deals directly with the creature and the creature with the Creator."[15] The possibilities and freedom this concept offers is extraordinary. Ignatian spirituality begins in an encounter of God's unconditional love and acceptance, a love that is unique and specific to each individual person. Between this and the increased importance and understanding of intersectionality within identity, honoring an individual's experiences becomes even more imperative within higher education. This expands a conversation beyond a dominant narrative to include those with marginalized

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[14] Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," *A Jesuit Education Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 155.
[15] Ivens, S.J. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 14.

identities. In The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition, a book focused on implications of the original text for women, the authors write, "Contemporary feminist epistemology corroborates Ignatius' insight…[and] implies that there may be multiple valid interpretations depending upon the unique and varied horizons of the interpreters."[16] Again, the emerging reality of mission allows for unique and contextual encounters of these values and approaches.

One example of how this is lived is in the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. DEI work in contemporary higher education hopes that this work will help individuals, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, to find a place of belonging within their respective communities. Belonging is not a phrase unique to higher education but finds particular relevance at the time of this research. According to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, once a person's basic needs are met, the first psychological need is belonging. According to Maslow, "belongingness is a reciprocal phenomenon that involves both giving and receiving belonging. It is because of such mutuality that the concept of belonging is perceptional in nature."[17] Employees are invited to embody the spirit of *cura personalis*, which can mean creating a sense of belonging for students. Because of the mutuality of this concept, by creating a sense of belonging for others, it increases the sense of belonging for those who began the process. Those with "feel themselves to be an indispensable and integral part of the system" are more committed

[16] Elizabeth Liebert SNMJ and Annemarie Paulin-Campbell, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition,* (New York: Paulist Press, 2022), 49.
[17] Bert Ellison and John M. Braxton, "Reviewing, Theorizing, and Looking Ahead: The Relationship Between College Students' Sense of Belonging and Persistence," *The Impact of a Sense of Belonging in College,* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Press, 2022). 36.

and personally involved.[18] The concept of c*ura personalis* invites a person to be loved in their full context, with each of their experiences, and the inherent relational quality of care and love itself while also then contributing to one's own sense of belonging and purpose.

Finally, the use of *cura personalis* is used as a balance to *cura apostolica*, or care of the institution. These two concepts can conflict with one another, but ideally the shared community recognizes that as employees are cared for and healthy, they will contribute to their place of work more meaningfully and generously. Caring for individual employees directly responds to this. Geger writes, "[University personnel] might be surprised to learn that, for Ignatius, [*cura personalis*] would have applied first and foremost to the care given to faculty and staff."[19] Ideally, the university administration recognizes the passion and commitment of those who choose to work at Jesuit institutions and the "what" and "who" of their work being more important than the volume of work. Universities do well by encouraging both actual vacation time, as well as space for formation opportunities. These specific times offered contribute to an individual seeing themselves as valued, but also as a contributor and co-laborer in the work. Within each of these three insights about *cura personalis,* there are opportunities for connection for religiously unaffiliated employees. The values of helping students develop as those wanting to work for the common good, honoring the unique person with each of their identities and experiences, and feeling supported themselves as employees are easy bridges to mission. As employees themselves experience being supported and cared for,

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[18] Ronald Hallett, Adrianna Kezar. Joseph Kitchen, and Rosemary Perez, "Facilitating a Sense of Belonging for Students with Multiple Identities," *The Impact of a Sense of Belonging in College,* (Sterling, VA: Stylus Press, 2022), 59.
[19] Geger, S.J, "*Cura Personalis,"* 6-20.

they will develop a greater openness to seeing and celebrating the goodness and gifts of others in the community.

Presupposition

A key Ignatian insight to contribute to an experience of *cura personalis* is the presupposition, based on a note in the original text of Ignatius, which states,

> So that the giver of the Exercises and the exercitant may the better help and benefit each other, it must be presupposed that every good Christian should be readier to justify than to condemn a neighbor's statement. If no justification can be found, one should ask the other in what sense the statement is to be taken, and if that sense is wrong the other should be corrected in love. Should this not be sufficient, let every appropriate means be sought whereby to have the statement interpreted in a good sense and so to justify it.[20]

The disposition to assume the best in others is inherently Ignatian and counter-cultural to American culture in general. This insight invites a mutual desire for respect and openness to those engaging in a meaningful connection. While the Exercises are speaking explicitly about the connection between someone doing the Spiritual Exercises and a spiritual director, this insight demonstrates the previously mentioned dynamism and an application of Ignatian spirituality. Those in Jesuit education have yet to exhaust the ways mission will be lived collectively and individually.

Embracing the presupposition as a preferred approach to others will allow broader participation in the lived expression of mission and include a wider swath of identities of those who can contribute. For example, the presupposition "will have particular relevance for those who accompany women in the Spiritual Exercises. These companions, especially if male, need to convey implicitly and explicitly their willingness to learn from

[20] Ivens, S.J. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 23.

and, at times, be challenged by these women."[21] Extrapolating this insight out of the Exercises and into the lived experience of Jesuit university employees, the presupposition challenges power dynamics, particularly of those that impact those who hold marginalized identities, namely race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Jesuit universities demonstrate a commitment to its mission both in its commitment to dismantling systems of oppression, but by doing so within a culture of mutual respect and openness. Additionally, an understanding of presupposition is timely and necessary in the current culture of polarization, "canceling," and vitriol seen within churches, national politics, and the greater global community. To begin from a point of assuming good within someone who seems in opposition to one's view could seem radical, let alone to then invite conversation and dialogue with a desire to understand. If nothing else, this concept could invite those with an Ignatian lens to honor the humanity within those for whom reconciliation seems impossible. Faculty, staff, and administrators modeling this for students and for each other would lead to a greater impact relationally and experientially for all.

Discernment

While there is great gift in assuming the best in ourselves and others, many moments require intentional reflection to understand another. One of the most well-known gifts of the Spiritual Exercises is the wisdom of discernment that Ignatius offers. The heart of discernment in Ignatian spirituality is about interior movements and awareness rather than a focus on general decision-making. Within the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius has two separate sets of Rules for Discernment which primarily focus on the

[21] Liebert SNMJ, & Paulin-Campbell. *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition,* 49.

ideas of consolation and desolation. Ignatius' own language defines consolation as "every increase of hope, faith, and charity, to all interior happiness which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one's soul, leaving the soul quiet and at peace."[22] This consolation described is an interior movement connected to, but not dependent upon, external circumstances. For example, if an individual is experiencing success, luck, and love, and the person turns to God in gratitude, savoring the gifts being given, that person is likely in consolation. However, an individual mired in grief but feeling connected to support from God and loved ones is also in consolation. Another element of consolation is the directionality of one's energy. Consolation "helps us to be less centered upon ourselves and to open out to others in generosity, service, and love."[23] In the experience of consolation, one is connected to their support systems as much as to a desire to be present to and serve others.

Desolation is the opposite of consolation and can include "darkness and disturbance in the soul…a lack of confidence in which one feels oneself to be without hope and without love…one finds oneself thoroughly lazy, lukewarm, sad, and as though cut off."[24] Again, desolation will look different to each person, as the external circumstances inform but do not directly determine how a person's spirit responds. A person could be encountering enormous success and fortune but not feel any of the above definitions of consolation. Easier to understand, a person meeting health, career, and relationship challenges might withdraw inward and away from support systems in an

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[22] David Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius,* (Saint Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources. 1978), 206.
[23] David Lonsdale, "Discernment of Spirits," *Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 179.
[24] Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 206.

effort of self-protection. Desolation has a "tendency to draw us away from God and things which have to do with God, and to lead us to be self-centered, closed in, and unconcerned about God or other people."[25] The impact of desolation leads a person to feeling isolated from others and often disconnected from oneself.

The discernment of spirits and awareness of consolation/desolation inform one's readiness to make a decision or choice. The Rules of Discernment created for the Spiritual Exercises and extrapolated into Ignatian spirituality more broadly focus on these topics and gives concrete methodology on how to proceed. For example, the fifth rule in the first set of rules states, "In times of desolation, one should never make any change but should stand firm and constant in the resolutions and decisions by which one was guided the day before the desolation."[26] If a person is disconnected from their communities of support, drawn away from what grounds and roots them, is feeling lazy and lukewarm, how could the individual make a choice that reflects their own inner wisdom and strength? While this rule sounds practical and straightforward, American culture heralds those who find fixes to problems in immediate ways, sometimes leading to rash decisions and quick changes of course. This culture also emphasizes technology, science, and rational thought over the inclusion of affect.[27] This rule of discernment demonstrates current psychological insights that "feelings have a crucial role" in decision-making and "goes further in asserting the importance of feelings by connecting our emotional awareness with our ability to decipher how we are being moved by God."[28] To return to

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[25] Lonsdale, "Discernment of Spirits," 180.
[26] Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 208.
[27] Noreen Cannon Au and Wilkie Au, "Refining the Acoustics of the Heart," *Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 195.
[28] Au and Au, "Refining the Acoustics of the Heart," 196.

the rule, Ignatius' insight acknowledges that desolation will happen but to trust the discernment and previous movements as a means of returning to one's self and to a connection with God.

A brief nuance to this conversation is necessary due to a 21st century understanding of mental health. Those teaching others and inviting others to this language of discernment should take care to differentiate between the spiritual movements of consolation and desolation from the reality of mental health, grief, and trauma. For example, if a person is in physical danger at the hands of a romantic partner and in desolation, the individual should not wait to be in consolation to remove themselves from harm. In The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition, the authors write, "When a person is in actual danger, either physical or psychological, one must *never* wait passively for circumstances to change."[29] This nuance and explanation is necessary due to the reality of domestic violence and other forms of harm. Adding this nuance may help some be more open to the wisdom being offered in these contexts as it helps it feel connected to current cultural understanding.

These internal states of consolation and desolation impact an individual's ability to hear the voice of God, as well as how they are able to hear their own wisdom and heart speaking. While this language is inviting to folks of a deist background, elements of it also relate to those from diverse religious contexts, including those without a faith tradition. Another way of framing the movements of consolation and desolation comes from the late spiritual director, Sr. Suzanne Zuercher, OSB, who defines discernment as

[29] Liebert SNMJ, & Paulin-Campbell. *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition,* 219.

"the awareness of centered or not-centered energy in the organism."[30] This kind of language invites a greater openness without changing the meaning of what consolation and desolation are. Another area of semantics deals with Ignatius' use of "good spirit" and "evil spirit" as the forces acting within a person's interior life. This kind of language can conjure cartoon images of angels and devils on one's shoulder or reflect a seemingly outdated understanding of a spiritual life. Contemporary Ignatian spirituality writer, Mark Thibodeaux, S.J. encourages the use of "false spirit" rather than evil as a means of being more accessible for those that find evil language to be unapproachable, particularly those who are not religiously affiliated.[31] Removing semantic roadblocks from those seeking understanding but removed from a religious tradition still allows for authenticity and becomes more invitational.

The Examen

Recognizing the need to discern how one is responding to their lives, Ignatius offers one of the most used tools of Ignatian spirituality, the Examen. The foundational nature of this prayer and reflection tool demonstrates the profound commitment to paying attention to one's experience as part of the spiritual life. This paying attention is not for purposes of narcissism or pure self-improvement, but to aid in discernment and the ability to listen to God's voice. Author Dennis Hamm, S.J. discusses four ways we hear the voice of God when explaining the Examen. He writes, "we hear God by attending to our experience, and interpreting it in the light of all those other ways of hearing the divine

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[30] Suzanne Zuercher, OSB. "What Discernment Means," *Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 217.
[31] Liebert SNMJ, & Paulin-Campbell. *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed, 2nd Edition,* 215.

voice – the structures of creation, the Bible, the living tradition of the community."[32] As one "listens" to their experience, it is examined, quite literally, through the lens of faith and community in which one is contextually located. From there, the connection to the previous discussion about discernment becomes clearer. Author Margaret Silf writes, "[The Examen] will help us distinguish between the movements of God within us, which result in consolation, and the movements that spring from our kingdoms or from the pressure of other people's kingdoms, which tend toward desolation."[33] The Examen invites consideration of what has occurred in one's daily life, but more intentionally, *how* one has responded to those circumstances.

For those without a faith tradition, listening to the voice of God seems unnecessary. However, listening to the voice of one's inner wisdom and savoring one's gifts in gratitude are spiritual practices that span religious traditions, including a secular humanist approach to life. The Examen helps provide a structure for this type of awareness to occur, in both obvious and less significant moments in life. Ignatian author, Jim Manney writes,

> Nothing in our lives is so insignificant that it doesn't deserve God's attention. In fact, the mundane and the humdrum parts of our lives give depth and texture to our relationships with God. Washing the windows and cooking dinner are as much a part of the relationship as graduation day. If it's part of our human experience, God is in it.[34]

Honoring the complexity of semantics, another way of describing the Examen is to replace God with another term. The late Fr. Michael Himes, long-time professor at

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[32] Dennis Hamm S.J., "Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards through Your Day," *Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 105.
[33] Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, (Chicago: Loyola Press. 1999), 81.
[34] Jim Manney, *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 6–7.

Boston College, argued that the starting foundation for what those working in Catholic higher education need to consider is defining God. He writes, "The least wrong way to imagine God, the Christian tradition says, is to think of God as love. The New Testament documents repeat this over and over again in parable and preaching."[35] If God is love, one encounters God when they encounter love. Exploring this topic in one's daily life draws one into the mystery of love, with whatever language is authentic to the individual.

The structure of the Examen is straightforward and adaptable, with the invitation for individuals to engage with this tool in a way that makes this meaningful for them. One remembers the Ignatian insight that the Creator deals directly with the creature in one's life, in as much as in how the person prays. This is to say, that each person will have their own unique life, unique connection to the Holy, and unique way of doing the Examen. This is encouraged. While there are many different formats and approaches to the Examen, the steps are consistent throughout. Co-founders of Spiritual Grounding, Oliver Goodrich and Lauren Schwer articulate the structure as including:

1. Begin by becoming aware of God's presence and ask God for the ability to have an open heart.
2. Review the day for the various events, conversations, and situations you encountered.
3. Name the gifts, graces, and the moments you felt God was most present in and thank God for each.
4. Be honest with yourself about the things that didn't go to plan—the frustrations, anxieties, and moments you behaved in a way you wish you hadn't. Consider whether you need to forgive someone and in what ways you might need to ask God for forgiveness.
5. Focus on the day ahead and pray about what you can do differently, as well as what you need and want for the next day.
6. Conclude with an Our Father, a Glory Be, or some other prayer.[36]

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[35] Michael Himes, "Living Conversations," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education 8* (Fall 1995): 23.
[36] Oliver Goodrich and Lauren Schwer, "My Life in God's Project," Content created 2020 for Spiritual Grounding, Week 0. Day 2.

This practice and these steps are adapted in innumerable ways throughout various parts of university life, including in the classroom, on retreat, in Residence Hall meetings, in Greek life functions, with athletic teams, and so forth. The gifts of the Examen are not done and are a bridge for individuals without a religious tradition. As Rita Dollard-O'Malley shared, "People find ways to connect with our way of praying and they adapt to what is appropriate for them. A prime example of this is the Examen. It's an intersection point, and it doesn't matter what their understanding of higher power or holy mystery is."[37] This intersection point that is invitational without being religiously demanding or demeaning of those who identify as atheist, agnostic, spiritual but not religious, or religiously unaffiliated. An approach of the Examen used in more secular or diverse settings could include rephrasing the above steps. For example:

1. Begin by centering yourself and bringing yourself to a place of openness and freedom, with the hope of looking back on your day as it has been.
2. Review your day for the various events, conversations, and situations you encountered.
3. Go through that list of what has happened looking for the gifts you received. Where did you feel love? Hope? Peace? Joy? When did you feel most alive? When were you proud of yourself? When did you feel seen or understood? What are you most grateful for?
4. Be honest with yourself about what went wrong. What were the challenges and frustrations? Where did you feel misunderstood? When did you feel sadness? Anger? Disappointment? Loneliness? Anxiety? Where do you need to forgive yourself or others?
5. As you come to the end of this day, what is it you want in the day ahead? What do you hope for? What would make tomorrow the best day it could be?
6. Conclude by taking a few deep breaths and allowing your body to re-enter the space you are in.

While this more secular approach does not include God, the questions invite reflection on the topics and experiences Ignatius believed were necessary for living a more integrated

[37] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.

life. Having employees who understand this nuance creates a deeper pool of those committed to this practice and a greater opportunity to invite students into this practice.

Freedom and Disordered Attachment

Paying attention to one's interior movements through the Examen will shine light on both the freedoms and disordered attachments one is holding. The opening annotation of the Spiritual Exercises defines its purpose and speaks to this reality. Ignatius wrote, "Spiritual Exercises is the name given to every way of preparing and making ourselves ready to get rid of all disordered affections so that, once rid of them, one might seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one's life."[38] Put another way, the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises, of Ignatian spirituality, or more broadly of the spiritual life, is to become more free and open to responding to one's unique call in the world by detaching oneself from those things that get in the way of that call.

The invitation to freedom from disordered attachment is an ever-present invitation through the Spiritual Exercises and at the same time relevant to people from a spectrum of backgrounds. Ignatius differentiates between attachments and disordered attachments as a way of honoring those things people are attached to that are life-giving and do not take away from one's ability to be free to God's call. Attachments themselves are not inherently disordered. For example, a cell phone itself is not evil. When a person cannot get through a meal with loved ones without looking at a cell phone, the attachment has become disordered. The attachment asserts control over the person, rather than the person being in relationship with the object of the attachment. Ignatian author Margaret Silf

[38] Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 4.

explains that the disordered aspect happens when the object, the desire, or the idea become "a compulsion or an addiction…that starts to take us over, so that we begin to make our choices, not in inner freedom, but in the desire to gain what we want or in the fear of losing something or someone to the point that our lives are negatively affected."[39] A spirit of freedom is needed in discernment, in responding to God's love, and in living one's daily and ever-changing life. Louis Savary comments on the Jesuit scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's approach to spirituality, saying "For Teilhard, evolution is happening not only in biology, geology, and astronomy, but in every aspect of life, individually, socially, psychologically, and spiritually."[40] The dynamic nature of life, of the Exercises, of mission, invites that freedom to accept, adapt, and respond in intentional ways rather than being mired in a nostalgic understanding of how things have been. This freedom opens possibilities for God's creativity and work in the world.

Not all disordered attachments are material. An individual manages disordered attachments around expectations of self internally and externally, including the expectation to be perfect, to make a certain amount of money, to have a particular relationship, to look a certain way, and so forth. A college student attached to being a doctor might miss the passion and call to study social work or education because of the image of what success is. Others have disordered attachments to how others should be. Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher coined the concept of I-Thou, which described relationships that are rooted in encounters where everyone involved is seen and celebrated as fully themselves rather than as an object or side character in one's story.

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[39] Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, 142.
[40] Louis Savary, *The New Spiritual Exercises: In the Spirit of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 16.

Buber's text, I and Thou, described this by saying, "Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its You is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness. As long as the presence endures, this world-wideness cannot be infringed."[41] Buber uses this to describe how God is capable of being in relationship with each unique person but describes the possibility of human relationships as well. These relationships are challenging when one expects another to respond in a certain way, wishes the relationship were something it is not, and so forth. When the focus is on how someone else is not living up to expectations, the gifts of that person can be missed or ignored.

A final non-material disordered attachment involves one's own sphere of understanding. One is invited to consider what areas of disordered attachment could prevent one from being free to consider and respond to the needs of the greater world. With deeper internal freedom, one is able to look outward more effectively. The invitation is to attend to one's own areas of unfreedom to bring commitment and availability to the needs of the world that are in alignment with the values of God's Project of justice and peace. These conversations about freedom and disordered attachment directly contribute to the ongoing and ever-changing work in higher education. Employees, with any or no religious tradition, could benefit from an exploration of where freedom and disordered attachment are present within both their personal and professional lives. A shared language around this topic could enable more meaningful dialogue among colleagues where tension is present with regard to ending long-standing traditions or ways of proceeding, responding to budget cuts, or navigating how a university responds to national and international events. The more employees are

[41] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), 126-7.

able to strive for greater internal and communal freedom, the more possible growth and depth will be.

The above engagement with Ignatian spirituality is by no means exhaustive but defines and illustrates possibility for several commonly named and utilized elements of the Jesuit charism. This list included connecting the depth of *cura personalis* with diversity and inclusion work, naming the presupposition, exploring consolation and desolation in the context of discernment, demonstrating the usefulness of the Examen, and engaged in a dialogue about freedom and disordered attachment. Each of these gifts of Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the Spiritual Exercises and a worldview that includes the Christian God. However, each of the above gifts invite reflection, growth, and intentionality from anyone affiliated with Jesuit higher education due to the practicality and applicability of the content. As employees are invited to consider the impact Ignatian spirituality can have in their own understanding of experience, context, and relationships, there is greater possibility for freedom and openness to other parts of Jesuit mission, as well as a sense of connection to the institution overall.

A Commitment to Justice as Recognition of God's Work in the World

The second hallmark of mission in Jesuit higher education is a commitment to justice as recognition of God's work in the world, or more simply put, a commitment to justice and the common good. This is a priority for all Jesuit apostolates, particularly in connection to the Universal Apostolic Preferences. The second UAP is *Walking with the Excluded: Walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice*. While the phrase social justice has taken many definitions, contexts, and approaches in history, the idea of social justice

appears in Catholic documents as early as the 19th century and is clearly articulated in Jesuit literature and presentations from the 20th century to the present. Social justice is a phrase often referenced in articulating mission in Jesuit institutions. However, social justice is used in a wide variety of contexts and is sometimes invoked as contrary to the Jesuit Catholic identity rather than recognizing the longstanding roots within this tradition. The Jesuit Catholic approach to social justice is ideally one that can be inviting to those from diverse backgrounds. This understanding of social justice has three significant influences, that being its spiritual roots in the Spiritual Exercises, the gifts of Catholic Social Teaching, and the 20th century Jesuit leadership of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. and Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. With these influences explored, contemporary examples of Jesuit institutions seeking to walk with the excluded towards a place of reconciliation can highlight the impact of these roots. The following sections will unpack these influences and examples.

Since 2016, Jesuit colleges and universities have taken part in a year-long Mission Priority *Examen* to investigate how and how effectively an institution is living the Jesuit mission. In this process, the institution is invited to consider seven characteristics, including "Characteristic 3: The Pursuit of Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation." According to the reflection document, created by the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities,

> Jesuit Universities, though imperfect and embedded in flawed systems, are called to be a 'project of social transformation.' Amid the pervasive reality of racism, the imperative to care for our planet; and the need to respond to a range of other issues of moral urgency, we need to rely on our deepest resources as Jesuit, Catholic institutions. Our distinctive faith traditions and spiritual roots can offer hope and creative energy to make change. We are invited to imagine justice as a generative network of right relationships and to achieve that, we must be ready for

> a long process of repair and commitment to truth, which may alone yield authentic reconciliation among fractured peoples.[42]

Seeing Jesuit higher education as a project of social transformation, as a project where all are invited to be collaborators and team members, is one of the clearest and easiest bridges to build for all employees, particularly those without a faith tradition.

Roots of Justice and Reconciliation in the Spiritual Exercises

To fully appreciate the nuanced understanding of social justice for Jesuit education, it is important to recognize the influences involved in its formation. This section deals with the explicitly Ignatian spiritual roots that contribute to an understanding of social justice, as well as the possibilities for connection for those outside the Christian tradition, despite the Christo-centric nature of this influence. During the opening movements of the Spiritual Exercises, an individual praying the Spiritual Exercises seeks to encounter God's unconditional presence and love in the Principle and Foundation and the extension of that unconditional love seen as mercy in the First Week. Because of this experience, the person seeks to more intimately know the source of that love, namely God and specifically in the person of Jesus in the Second and Third Weeks. One major meditation of the Second Week is called the Two Standards. According to Ivens, this meditation "puts before the [participant] a faith-vision of reality in terms of two value-systems, that of Christ and that of the enemy of human nature."[43] Ignatius lays out clearly the values in each system and invites the person to pray about which values is more congruent for them. The values of God's Project are relevant and accessible for a

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[42] "Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education: A Guide for Mission Reflection," Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, created in 2021, pg. 17, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55d1dd88e4b0dee65a6594f0/t/612fafa56362bb224b00f773/1630515115139/A+Guide+for+Mission+Reflection_09-21.pdf.

[43] Ivens, S.J. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 105.

diverse community, including: Indifference to honors, recognizing the humanity in others, humility, solidarity, community, cooperation, hope, and faith.[44] Alternatively, the values of Standard of Satan (other names for this include Babylon Project, the Enemy's Project, etc.) include the qualities of contemporary upward mobility, pride, riches, competition, covetousness, fear, and mistrust.[45] The participant prays about their freedom to respond to this choice, but not in a pious way. According to Monty Williams, S.J., the desired graces of the Two Standards are "to understand truly how we get trapped; second, to receive help to escape those traps; third, to understand how Christ behaves; and, fourth, to ask for and receive the grace to follow him."[46] The intentionality and honesty of this meditation is necessary for the person to be able to proceed into the next movements of the Exercises.

This context is highly Christo-centric, involving language of the enemy/Satan, and could easily be seen as irrelevant to those outside of Christianity. However, the values themselves invite further consideration and reflection for those engaging in Ignatian contexts. The dialogue about social justice begins to include motivation, freedom, and desire in how to respond. It includes the reality that the presence of hope and faith can help sustain the exhausting, frustrating, and slow work of justice. Additionally, the invitation to community and shared labor in the Two Standards invites all people to consider what their unique role and contribution can be in the context of communal justice work. If one is aware of teammates also committed to the work of

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[44] Dean Brackley, S.J., *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times,* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 99-101.
[45] Brackley, S.J., *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times,* 93-95.
[46] Monty Williams, S.J., *The Gift of Spiritual Intimacy,* (Ontario, Canada: Novalis Publishing, Inc., 2009), 147.

justice, the pressure to fix everything alone can lessen. As one listens to their experiences of witnessing injustice in the world, they uncover where they want to make a contribution, reflect upon their own context and capacity, and build relationships with others of similar ilk. The relationships built can be among the outcast and marginalized named in the second UAP. The work of justice in the Ignatian tradition has roots in the human connection and genuine relationship-building in addition to the procedural, academic, and intellectual parts of advocacy and charity work.

The Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises invites the participant to live out the election and commitment made in the Two Standards in times that are difficult and hard. The imaginative prayer focuses on the Passion of Jesus, where the individual is invited to suffer with Christ suffering, both in the prayer and context of Jesus, but also in the suffering of Christ in our world today. According to Ivens, "In the case of the Third Week, this more intimate and participatory grace is commonly designated by the word compassion (literally suffering with)."[47] The person walks the way of the cross with Jesus, but also contemplates, grieves, and suffers over the pain in today's world. As Brackley writes, "We do not desire any more pain in the world. We simply want, and need, to share the pain that is there, in order to lighten the load for all of us…The focus is not on pain but on *being with* the one who suffers."[48] As a person finds the freedom and capacity to follow the values of the Christ project, in this movement, the person must ask for greater freedom and availability to show up and be present in the darker times of commitment. This is demonstrated in accompanying someone managing a health crisis or

[47] Ivens, S.J. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 147.
[48] Brackley, S.J., *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times,* 178.

approaching death, in walking alongside someone on death row, or in showing up for a funeral of the family member of a colleague. This approach of accompaniment is imperative to an Ignatian understanding of justice and reconciliation in the world, seen even in the language of the UAPs of "walking with." As Jesuit universities and colleges consider how to live this UAP and promote the social justice element of mission that so many employees strive for and relate to, it is important to be rooted in its initial context and lived with this nuance, even for those disconnected from the person of Jesus.

Catholic Social Teaching

The influence of the Spiritual Exercises contributes to an understanding of social justice that is then honed through its engagement with Catholic teaching and tradition. Shortly before the Society of Jesus addressed the need for a greater commitment to justice in the modern world, Pope John XXIII began articulating more concrete elements of what has become the body known as Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Pope John XXIII built upon 70+ years of papal encyclicals that spoke to the social realities and justice crises occurring in "real time." For example, *Rerum Novarum*, published in 1891, spoke to the injustices within labor realities. In 1931, *Quadragesimo Anno*, responded to the global economic crisis of the 1929 American stock market crash. Pope John Paul XXIII's papal encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, continued this trend of response. Moral theologian Thomas Massaro, S.J. writes that "each new encyclical can be interpreted as an occasion for the Church to address the challenges of new events on the world stage…and builds on the insights of its predecessors."[49] This dynamism is not often

[49] Thomas Massaro, S.J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 50.

associated with the Catholic Church. Sometimes called the best kept secret of the Catholic Church, CST challenges a status quo sensibility and provides a road map for the values that root a Catholic understanding of justice. The body of CST clearly contributed to how the Society of Jesus developed its own particular sense of and approach to justice.

While a more involved discussion about the tension between Jesuit and Catholic for religiously unaffiliated employees will be included in chapter four, those who are resistant to the Catholic part of Jesuit mission could see anything named as Catholic as a stumbling block. However, the nine themes of CST, particularly dignity of the human person, solidarity and the common good, the dignity of work/rights of workers, and a preferential option for the poor, are relevant and timely for those engaging in higher education generally. Some of the above-mentioned resistances can come from frustration stemming from when the Catholic Church does not only not live up to these values but appears to actively fight against these them. For example, despite the Church trying to address the importance of the social sin of racism, many dismiss their need to participate in this arena. Massaro writes, "most people are tempted to evade responsibility for wrongs they are directly responsible for; they are even more likely to ignore the ways in which their indirect responsibility for evil issues a call for repentance."[50] For those coming from secular or humanist perspectives that are deeply committed to the work of racial justice, a dismissal or lack of response can seem like hypocrisy. However, some are able to hear these values, see them as aspirational, and see how they could be the direction the Church is trying to head. Inviting employees to be aware of these themes and this body of Church teaching could provide additional spaces where one sees their

[50] Massaro, S.J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 166.

own values already alive within the institution. While not the most obvious starting point for religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit institutions, CST could serve as a space for additional depth and understanding more long-term.

20th Century Jesuit Leadership

Finally, the third influence on a contemporary understanding of social justice for Jesuit higher education comes from Jesuit leadership in the 20th century. The Post-World War II era of the Society of Jesus was led by two Superior Generals that helped reignite the Society and influenced notable shifts in Jesuit higher education explicitly and implicitly. The first of these two men is Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (Superior General from 1965-1983). Prior to his role as Superior General, Arrupe, a doctor by trade, responded to the victims of the Hiroshima bombing due to his proximity and medical training. His firsthand account of the devastation of the bomb, as well as his time spent with those living in abject poverty in Latin America, deepened his understanding of the need and definitive call to the work of justice. Due to his popularity and influence, he was named Superior General in 1965. Renowned Jesuit historian John O'Malley, S.J. described the time of Arrupe's leadership as transformative and included investigating and updating the various components of Jesuit life.[51] The 31st General Congregation, with Arrupe at the lead, "made recommendations as to how [the Jesuits] could be more responsive to modern needs" and included a document on the importance of ecumenism (a first for the Society of Jesus).[52] This updated mission also included a directive about serving the

[51] John O'Malley, S.J., *The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 101.
[52] O'Malley, S.J., *The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present*, 102.

hungry and poor, leading to the creation of Jesuit Refugee Services.[53] In this refocus of the Society and affirmation of the areas of justice already being tended to, it is logical that this would impact the role of Jesuit higher education.

Perhaps Arrupe's most significant impact on Jesuit higher education was his presentation to alumni of Jesuit schools entitled "Men for Others" in 1973. At that time, the majority of alumni were men, but as that demographic shifted, "Men and Women for Others" became the vernacular. Given a 21st century understanding of gender, many Jesuit schools have embraced the phrase "People for Others" to be as inclusive as possible. Semantics aside, Arrupe acknowledged where Jesuit higher education had missed opportunities for the work of justice and said,

> Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others…people who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; people convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for human beings is a farce…It is thus that we must sow justice in our world, substituting love for self-interest as the driving force of society.[54]

The work of justice and desire to contribute to the suffering in the world was no longer a side project, but a direct priority for what Jesuit education was to be at its core. This objective from Arrupe was rooted in the Exercises, as he noted, "[The Spiritual Exercises] are a method that does not limit us to any particular option, but spreads out before us the whole range of practicable options in any given situation; opens up for us a sweeping vision embracing many possibilities."[55] It is precisely in the spirituality and understanding of God inviting individuals and communities to co-labor in God's project

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[53] O'Malley, S.J., *The Jesuits: A History from Ignatius to the Present*, 102.
[54] Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "Men for Others," (speech, International Congress of Alumni of Jesuit Schools, Valencia, Spain, July 31, 1973).
[55] Arrupe, S.J., "Men for Others."

of love and justice in the world that led to this well-known and celebrated characteristic of Jesuit higher education. Robert Mitchell, S.J., defined five traits of Jesuit education in a 1988 article for Boston College magazine, and named the role of ethics, values, and integrity. He wrote, "Jesuit institutions have tried to focus attention on the great questions of justice and fairness that confront our age: economic problems, racism, and unemployment in our own country; peace and war and the proliferation of arms; and poverty and oppression."[56] This trait of Jesuit education continues to be one employees, students, and alumni recognize and find ways to animate from a wide range of backgrounds.

The second Superior General to continue the formation of Jesuit higher education is Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach (Superior General from 1983-2008). While he helped promote dialogue around religious pluralism and leadership among lay colleagues, as well as navigated complicated relationships between the Society of Jesus and the Vatican, he is notably known for his address to Santa Clara University in 2000 entitled, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Higher Education." The title alone demonstrates a nuanced complexity that for Jesuit education, faith and justice are inextricably connected. This address is foundational to a contemporary understanding of the purpose of Jesuit higher education. While still committed to excellence in the classroom and robust engagement of complicated matters of life, Kolvenbach stated,

> Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think,

[56] Robert Mitchell, S.J., "Five Traits of Jesuit Education," *A Jesuit Education Reader,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 112.

> judge, choose and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed.[57]

Jesuit education is rooted in experience, context, and relationships, but those experiences, context, and relationships must also involve direct contact with genuine suffering and the grittiness many experience regularly. Additionally, it is in this context the Ignatian slogan "contemplatives in action" arises. Ignatian spirituality marks a difference between meditation (using the intellect) and contemplation (using the intellect and affect).

Author Marina Berzins McCoy describes contemplation as "learning how to see, being attentive and present to the possibility of grace wherever I am and whatever I am doing. In matters of social justice, we also have to see and listen rather than imposing our ideas of what we think someone else might need."[58] In this case, a contemplative in action is one who intentionally reflects and prays on the need and circumstances and listens to those they are trying to serve before taking action. This is different from those who choose to pray and not act or those that act but do not take time to consider possibilities in advance. This way of proceeding will be more deeply discussed within a consideration of educational pedagogy. Ultimately, Kolvenbach established the bar by which he argued Jesuit education should be judged. He said, "The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become. Tomorrow's 'whole person' cannot be whole without a well-educated solidarity."[59] For a Jesuit school to meet that standard, it will require the support and encouragement of staff, faculty, and administrators for

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[57] Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," 155.
[58] Marina Berzins McCoy, "Contemplation in Action," Post on IgnatianSpirituality.com, July 2023, https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/contemplation-in-action/.
[59] Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," 155.

students, as well as modeling with their own behavior to mirror the importance of this mission priority. Thankfully, this invitation to solidarity, to directly engaging and responding to the needs of our world, is a value by which any member of the community can contribute and support. Individuals from secular humanist or religiously unaffiliated spaces are able to uniquely contribute to the promotion of justice and bring in different perspectives and approaches that can widen the impact a Jesuit university can make.

Contemporary Examples of Lived Mission

Utilizing the three major influences of an understanding of Ignatian social justice, namely that of the Spiritual Exercises, Catholic Social Teaching, and the leadership of the Society of Jesus in the 20th century, it is possible to see the specificity of this approach and how it is lived through contemporary examples. For example, one current topic Jesuit education is wrestling with is responding to climate crisis. This is another overlap for all those affiliated with Jesuit work through the UAPs. The fourth UAP for the Society of Jesus is *Caring for our Common Home: Collaborate, with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's creation.* The Jesuits recognize the profound need for a response to climate crisis and the opportunities the various apostolates of the Society have to intentionally respond. On the Jesuits global website that identifies the UAPs and offers strategy and prayer, one hope named is that "Our centers of higher learning want to identify areas where they can make a difference and contribute to a change of mind and heart."[60] Colleges and universities have a role to play in the Jesuits response to this crisis, including inviting ourselves and others to be transformed. This transformation is possible

[60] "Caring for our Common Home," Jesuits Global, Accessed June 28, 2023, https://www.jesuits.global/uap/caring-for-our-common-home/.

as individuals and groups encounter experiences of freedom from the ways we culturally have approached creation. Dominican theologian Matthew Fox speaks in his book, Creation Spirituality, about the liberating nature of creation spirituality and an attentiveness to the needs of the environment. Paralleling the Ignatian concept of freedom and attachment, Fox demonstrates how a lived creation spirituality allows a freedom for finding the sacredness within creation rather than seeing it as utility; a freedom for wonder and creativity, a freedom for gratitude and thankfulness, a freedom from fatigue for youthfulness, and a freedom for a deeper understanding of compassion.[61] This concept of how respect and awe for creation invites deeper freedom can then translate into concrete response, demonstrating how a Contemplative in Action might develop. As one falls in love with creation, an individual is more likely to see, listen, and discern what the best course of action might be and then to work on its behalf.

This UAP was deeply informed by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home.* In the same way that CST adapts and responds to the needs of the current time, Pope Francis identified the truth of the climate crisis for the Church as well as demonstrated how the climate crisis impacts the experience of the poor and marginalized at increased levels. To begin, Pope Francis states that "It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face."[62] This document touches on Church teaching, Ignatian spirituality, a call for justice, and the way forward with hope, connecting all four of the UAPs, though the

[61] Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality,* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 90-96.
[62] Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home,* (Maryland: The Word Among Us Press, 2015), 19.

UAPs did not exist until four years later. Clearly connecting the need for care of common home to the marginalized, Pope Francis quoted a pastoral letter from the Bolivian Bishops' Conference, which said, "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest."[63] He connects both the experiential reality of those serving the poor along with data and science to prove this truth and raise a call for greater support. Considering how higher education can contribute to this work, those in Jesuit institutions have the opportunity to lead individuals to spaces to authentically face these dire realities. Pope Francis names a "lack of physical contact and encounter…[that] can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tendentious analyses which neglect parts of reality."[64] These encounters can occur in a classroom, during an extracurricular activity, doing community service, or simply by having a conversation with a roommate with a different background or understanding of things.

By expanding one's contact with the poor, to the "gritty reality" that Kolvenbach named, there is opportunity to deepen an identity of being a Contemplative in Action. Returning to a three-fold approach of an Ignatian pedagogy, that of experience, context, and relationships, a response to the climate crisis is latent with this way of proceeding. Ultimately, Pope Francis believes, "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself."[65] A human connection to the environment is necessary for true reconciliation (the second UAP) to develop and deepen. It is in the

[63] Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home,* 39.
[64] Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home,* 40.
[65] Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home,* 90-91.

reconciliation process, alongside a contemplative process of discernment, that Jesuit institutions can determine new ways of approaching this social injustice issue of our time.

Another contemporary way Jesuit higher education is practically living its mission of justice is through the reconciliation process seen at Georgetown University. Georgetown is attempting to reconcile with the families of the 272 slaves that it owned and then sold during the building of the university. Beginning in 2016, the president of the university and the then-president of the Jesuit Conference of North America publicly apologized for its wrongdoing and contributions to systemic racism in the United States. Fr. Tim Kasicki, the then-president of the Conference, said, "Today the Society of Jesus, who helped to establish Georgetown University and whose leaders enslaved and mercilessly sold your ancestors, stands before you to say that we have greatly sinned…and because we are greatly sorry."[66] While some were grateful for this acknowledgement and beginning of a reconciliation process, others viewed this as lip service without meaningful engagement. It was because of the courage of the descendants to demand action that yielded an apology from the then-Superior General, Fr. Arturo Sosa, S.J., who called for actual dialogue. While these conversations led to some concrete measures, there was still disagreement about timeline and size of contributions from the Jesuits and Georgetown. The descendants asked for $1 billion for reparations. Georgetown agreed to utilize student fees to raise $400,00 annually to provide financial support to the descendants of the 272 humans that were enslaved and sold. The Jesuits committed to fundraising for a new charitable foundation that despite falling short of the number asked for by descendants has raised millions of dollars for grants, educational

[66] Rachel Swarns, *The 272*, (New York: Random House, 2023), 224.

opportunities, and emergency needs of descendants.[67] Additionally, Georgetown created The Georgetown Slavery Archive, developed new academic initiatives, and continue to look for more ways to engage the descendants of these families.[68] While the efforts of the East Coast Jesuits and Georgetown are imperfect, they are trying to more intentionally live a mission of justice and reconciliation in response to its past contributions to oppression, violence, and harm.

Georgetown's example demonstrates how the influences that created an understanding of social justice for the Society of Jesus are appropriated in a contemporary setting, while also connecting to the importance of responding to the injustice of racism. This example highlights the influence of the Spiritual Exercises (acknowledging its sins); of Catholic Social Teaching (listening to those who have been harmed); and of the standard Pedro Arrupe S.J. set (love of God without love of neighbor is impossible). All Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States have the opportunity to engage in the work of antiracism and understanding the intersectionality of oppression. Author and Scholar, Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, quotes Audre Lorde in his book, How to be an Antiracist,

> We have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals.[69]

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[67] Swarns, *The 272*, 228.
[68] "Georgetown Reflects on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation," Georgetown University website, Accessed June 28, 2023, https://www.georgetown.edu/slavery/.
[69] Ibram X Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, (One World. New York: 2019), 23.

The work of for racial justice is a definitive way of living Jesuit mission in Jesuit higher education and can be done so in a distinctly Jesuit way.

In 2020, Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., published his first book, The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice. As a Jesuit and man of color, Saint-Jean sets out to bring together Ignatian spirituality with the data and reality of racial injustice in our current time. Theologian M. Shawn Copeland says of this book, "Patrick Saint-Jean offers us a way to heal our battered souls and bereaved hearts, using reflection, journaling, and reading in openness, humility, and prayer to lead us to concrete acts of love for our neighbors."[70] This book is being used at multiple Jesuit colleges and universities, both with students and with employees with generally positive reception. If a common denominator of employees in Jesuit higher education is the work of racial justice, how can Jesuit institutions be more intentional about articulating its connection to the foundations of the Society and at the same time celebrate the ways people embody this work without a faith tradition? Saint-Jean quoted Roger Haight as naming Ignatian spirituality as something that champions "a radical commitment to this world and the people in it, on the conviction that the very actions that carry out that commitment are responses of love to the God of love that is within it all."[71] A response to love is possible with or without the naming of God or a faith tradition, particularly in an area where those employed at Jesuit institutions are deeply committed and desiring ways to further this part of the university's lived expression of mission. Social justice at a Jesuit school should be nuanced and unique as compared to how other institutions of higher education live this part of their commitment

[70] M. Shawn Copeland, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice* book cover, (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2020).
[71] Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice,* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2020), 17.

and mission. This invites greater formation and dialogue among the school's communities as those within the institutions are invited to live out social justice in this Jesuit way while also knowing there are other approaches and understandings of social justice in a secular context. The uniqueness of this approach does not eliminate those without a religious tradition from participation but must be shared in a way that is compelling and relevant.

This section is by no means an exhaustive study of the ways Jesuit colleges and universities demonstrate that social justice is lived as a response to God's work in the world. However, it demonstrates how the foundational spirituality of the Jesuits, modern understandings of Catholic Social Teaching, and the call and standards set by 20th century Jesuit leadership can impact how institutions choose to live their respective call to work for justice and reconciliation in their specific communities and the world. Two lived expressions of this mission in contemporary culture include a response to the climate crisis and the work of racial justice, particularly in the United States. Each institution has its opportunity to contribute meaningfully, whether in considering new operational ways of university life that are eco-friendly, inviting community members to encounter the gritty reality of the suffering caused particularly for the poor due to climate change, working toward reconciliation through dialogue and reparations for the sin of slavery, or in the invitation to reflection and prayer about the spiritual work of racial justice. While the context for this work is inherently Jesuit and Catholic, the approach is invitational and leaves room for the unique gifts and approaches of any teammate involved in this work of justice. Each individual, specifically employee, will bring their respective experience, context, and relationships to this work of justice. Their unique contributions help build a

more diverse and more capable team for the challenging and exhausting work of social justice. Feeling as though someone is part of a team that both supports others and receives encouragement can enable a person to be sustained for this work.

Academic Excellence and Pedagogy

The third and final area of mission for Jesuit higher education is a commitment to excellence in the classroom, an excellence that is rooted in a specific pedagogical paradigm. According to the AJCU, the second characteristic of a Jesuit university is rooted in an excellence of academic life. The AJCU describes this as "The University's academic life and institutional choices clearly represent the Jesuit and Catholic commitment to a liberal arts and Christian humanistic education for all students."[72] The following sections will explore mission as it is expressed by a commitment of the schools to strive for excellence in instruction, to engage in meaningful dialogue, to develop connections within the Jesuit network, and to utilize an Ignatian pedagogical paradigm in a myriad of contexts. While the spiritual tradition and commitment to justice differentiate Jesuit colleges and universities from other institutions of higher education more explicitly, the commitment to excellent education is a more implicit contribution to what makes Jesuit schools appealing both for students and as a place of employment. Being at a Jesuit Catholic institution signifies something beyond general higher education, as it is part of the mission rather than just the function of the institution. As Michael Tunney, S.J. shared,

> Our mission calls us out of the mindset that higher education is all professionalized and identified with a specific discipline. At Jesuit Catholic institutions, there is something larger and something greater than personal

[72] "Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education," AJCU, 11.

> research projects and academic excellence. It's not denying them but infusing them with this sense of catholicity.[73]

This catholicity, an all-embracing approach to education is meant to invite all community members in, especially faculty and staff.

A Standard of Excellence

With 27 universities and colleges in the United States in the 21st century, the Jesuit educational approach and pedagogy has a particular "brand." One element of that "brand" is a commitment to excellence. For example, Boston College's tagline is "Ever to Excel." The AJCU offers a "Jesuit Excellence Tour," which invites prospective students to explore each of the 27 schools, rooting even first impressions within excellence.[74] When defining Jesuit education in only five characteristics, Robert Mitchell, S.J. names that, "excellence is important. The institution has, in every age, sought good education, respected by those who know the field."[75] This means the excellence is not limited to the study of theology or religion, but that each institution strives to excel in the teaching and scholarship necessary for a reputation of excellence in higher education more broadly. In the 2024 US News and World Report updated rankings of undergraduate institutions, seven Jesuit schools were honored (Georgetown, Boston College, Santa Clara, Marquette, Fordham, Gonzaga, and Loyola Marymount).[76] 14 of the 27 schools have law schools and four have medical schools. Jesuit higher education is not just about educating people for faith, but for developing people of intellectual ability

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[73] Tunney, S.J., Interview.
[74] "Jesuit Excellence Tours (JET)," Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Accessed July 2023, https://ajcunet.edu/about/colleges-universities/jet-tour/.
[75] Mitchell, S.J., "Five Traits of Jesuit Education," 111.
[76] "Best National University Rankings," US News and World Reports, Updated after September 18, 2023 publication date, https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities.

and ethical discernment in the modern world who will have an opportunity to influence society in any vocational role one discerns. Fr. Michael Tunney, S.J., shared, "Our professional schools, schools of education, business, engineering, nursing, they are all service-oriented and related. They get the aspirational, selfless giving back qualities of Jesuit mission in higher education. This is part of how we live mission."[77] The mission ideally percolates into all areas of discipline, and this has been lived out in many areas.

For students to have this experience of excellence, it necessitates the faculty and staff involved in their education being committed to that same expectation of quality and brand. This brand of educational excellence seeks answers to deeper questions rather than memorizing rote answers. Regis University articulates critical thinking skills as one of the benefits of a Jesuit education, stating, "We challenge you to be curious, to ask questions and to solve problems, including the world's most pressing issues. At Regis, we hope that you come with questions – and leave with deeper questions."[78] Jesuit education aspires to excellence by seeing education as a means to an end, rather than the end itself. As Dean Brackley, S.J. names in his article about Catholic higher education, "A second standard is related to this: focus on the big questions. Wisdom, not mere information, is the goal of education."[79] There is a difference between wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom and truth go beyond simply knowing to integrating experience and knowledge into meaningful and relevant ways. Wisdom also possesses the capacity for integrated understanding to go beyond one's own social context. Educational practitioner Fr. Dan

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[77] Tunney, S.J., Interview.
[78] "Benefits of a Jesuit Education," Regis University, Accessed July 5, 2023, https://www.regis.edu/about/jesuit-education/index.
[79] Dean Brackley, S.J., "Higher Standards," *A Jesuit Education Reader,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 190.

Hartnett, S.J. wrote, "A cognitional way of understanding this Ignatian methodology is to realize that the antidote to self-immersion is self-transcendence."[80] After students have done the work of integrating experience and learned knowledge in the classroom, there is a freedom to turn outward and determine how this wisdom can contribute to the greater world. This is transformative approach Jesuit education is seeking for its students and what Jesuit education is expecting of those engaging students in and out of the classroom.

An additional part of the brand of excellence in Jesuit education is the primacy of a core curriculum within a liberal arts environment. The core curriculum requires students to study many subjects they might not have interest in or have considered in the past. It is in the exposure to other fields of study that many students discover new passions or connections to their personal vocation. While the expectation of Jesuit education is that students will learn "to be able to think and speak and write; to know something about history, literature, and art; to have their minds expanded by philosophy and theology; and to have some understanding of math and sciences", the hope is that students will come into contact with something that causes them to develop personal passions or ways of contributing to the greater world around them after graduation.[81] A core curriculum contributes to the development of wisdom beyond knowledge. Monika Hellwig, theologian and Georgetown faculty members describes this experience as:

> The foundation in the liberal arts is important in developing both a more effective use of the imagination in creative approaches to personal, technical, professional, and societal changes, and better honed skills in critical thinking and evaluation. The benefits ought to include the integration of learning, the realization of the community dimension, increasing experience of the continuity of faith and reason, a deepening respect for and appreciation of the cumulative wisdom of the past,

[80] Dan Hartnett, S.J., "Transformative Education in the Jesuit Tradition," created in 2009, Loyola University Chicago, 8, https://www.luc.edu/media/lucedu/president/pdfs/FINAL-LoyolaTransformativeEducation-2015.pdf.
[81] Mitchell, S.J., "Five Traits of Jesuit Education," 111.

> progressive transcending of facile and unexamined prejudices and, of course, the integration of life and learning.[82]

A liberal arts education in the Jesuit context can trace its roots to the *Ratio Studiorum*, or plan of studies. While institutions revise this plan of studies regularly, this approach to a core curriculum is "basically a codification of curricular, administrative, and pedagogical principles."[83] These principles contribute to the uniqueness of a Jesuit core curriculum, in that it is not just for the student's vocational discernment, but also for a spaciousness that engages different perspectives, hears the voices of the marginalized, and provides space for an honest reflection on one's own complicity in unjust systems within the wider community.

While this is the hope and expectation for students, the ability to provide these opportunities will depend on the capacity of those facilitating this style of education. To have integrity, faculty and staff also are invited to continue doing their own work of wisdom-building, wrestling with fields that appear to be in contradiction, and examining their own prejudices and places of unawareness. This invitation to represent those seeking wisdom is not limited to or exclusive to those with a faith background. An expectation of this kind of excellence is available to anyone open to this.

Dialogue

In addition to the standard of excellence, Jesuit mission is also committed to creating a community that places value upon open and genuine dialogue. According to the Society of Jesus' Communal Dialogue about Jesuit higher education,

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[82] Monika Hellwig, "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University," *A Jesuit Education Reader,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 253-254.
[83] John O'Malley, S.J., "How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education," *A Jesuit Education Reader,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 57.

> The contemporary Jesuit university is committed to creating a community of dialogue and service. Dialogue is the mutual investment in learning through listening, through honest exchange, and through a desire to come to a new level of understanding and appreciation. Dialogue enjoys a privileged place in the Ignatian tradition.[84]

In the same way that discernment, reflection, and prayer invite deep listening, so too does dialogue among peers, instructors, students, and staff. It is in the listening and honest exchange that internal growth can advance alongside the acquisition of new ideas and is characterized by the openness for this growth to occur in all directions. At the core of this value is the belief that faculty will learn from students as students learn from them; that the learning process is not complete for anyone involved in this education. In a culture of division and "othering" of those who perceive and approach the world differently, the need for listening and finding concrete ways of articulating experience and perspective almost feels radical. Even in times when dialogue feels challenging or impossible, the commitment to meaningful conversation and understanding of other can be the bridge needed to rebuild a community. As Hartnett wrote, "A transformative pedagogy trains students for dialogue and conversation, providing a way to tackle the root of so many crises that face humanity today. It is also a way of bridging the divides of gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class."[85] The divides that exist put individuals and communities into silos and can create systems that increase misunderstanding or willingness to cross over the places of disagreement and contention. However, the heart of dialogue creates space that enables people to feel safe and open to speaking their own

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[84] "Communal Reflection on the Jesuit Mission in Higher Education: A Way of Proceeding." *Jesuit Conference to Colleagues in Higher Education*. 2002. https://www.marquette.edu/mission-ministry/documents/communal-reflection-on-the-jesuit-missionin-higher-education.pdf.

[85] Hartnett, S.J., "Transformative Education," 7.

truths while also hearing and holding the truths of others.

This movement is mirrored in the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises. Once the person doing the Spiritual Exercises prays with and encounters God's unconditional love, the stability and rootedness they feel gives the courage and freedom to genuinely look through their brokenness and/or sin without the fear of God's love dissipating or disappearing. As Jesuit institutions create spaces where people encounter a sense of belonging and affirmation, the capacity to engage in authentic dialogue increases, allowing for the brand of Jesuit education to thrive. This reality is true for employees as much as students. A sense of belonging and safety enables a staff or faculty member to speak more honestly in difficult conversations. This sense of belonging is nuanced, as some employees hold a greater amount of freedom than others. A tenured faculty member has certain guarantees of protection, should they speak out against the institution itself. However, many staff members are at-will employees, meaning they are without contracts and thereby may have more reservations in how they engage in dialogue. That said, the creation of spaces that allow people to honestly share their experiences and feel a true sense of belonging is the responsibility of the institution and those employed there. As higher education scholar Dr. Terrell Strayhorn writes in his research, "Sense of belonging is vital to our existence and optimal human functioning…and leads to positive outcomes and success – it's about finding belonging but not fitting in."[86] When one has a sense of belonging, it is safe to disagree with another, share a difficult perspective, and still be safe in dialogue. That said, this understanding of education goes beyond a traditional understanding of higher education. As former Superior General of the Society of Jesus

[86] Terrell Strayhorn, "5 Things to Know About Sense of Belonging," July 17, 2023, https://terrellstrayhorn.com/5-things-to-know-about-sense-of-belonging/.

Arturo Sosa, S.J. wrote,

> Intellectual work is [an] apostolate when it is carried out in the open, not locked in a cabinet or within the comfort of its own certainties. When we are able to engage in a dialogue with our disciplines, allowing our position to be enhanced by other perspectives and diverse worldviews, by science and by culture. When it is experienced as a mission, as having been sent to contribute to the liberation of the world.[87]

This discourse and commitment to openness of difference stems from a spiritual foundation and contributes to the possibilities of all engaged in the work of Jesuit education.

The Jesuit Educational Network

Another element of mission in Jesuit higher education in the United States is a connection to the wider educational network that unites the colleges, universities, and secondary education schools. The shared language and consistent understanding of what Jesuit education is unites individuals and provides support for those doing similar work. Jesuit historian John O'Malley was impressed by "the working of the very network itself, that is, the working of the communication of Jesuit schools with one another."[88] When employers go to hire vacant positions and see another Jesuit institution on a resume or articulated in a cover letter, the hiring manager can often make assumptions that there is some understanding and connection to language and mission. These connections can enable both an easier on-boarding process, as well as a quicker sense of belonging within a new institution. In a culture where millennials and the generations after will likely have multiple jobs in multiple cities, there is even more opportunity to move within the Jesuit network at various points in one's career.

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[87] "Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education," AJCU, 12.
[88] O'Malley, S.J., "How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education," 59.

Among the shared language and mission, each institution has their own unique identity and geographic/cultural context, which serve as entry points for mission. As Rita Dollard-O'Malley shared,

> "Some people connect with the story of their university because they feel that the mission of their university in the place in which they are is important. For example, University of Detroit Mercy is clearly grounded in the city in which they live and caring for the city in which they live."[89]

Another example is Loyola University Chicago, which is located in Rogers Park, a diverse neighborhood in Chicago. According to a 2022 article in the Chicago Sun-Times, "Rogers Park not only is one of Chicago's most diverse neighborhoods. It most closely matches the racial and ethnic breakdown of the entire city, according to a Chicago Sun-Times analysis of 2020 census data."[90] The diversity of the third largest city in the country, as well as being rooted in the most diverse neighborhood in the city informs how Loyola Chicago engages with the community and who both students and employees represent. Comparatively, Boston College is located in Chestnut Hill, MA, a small village that is only partially in Boston proper. According to Boston Magazine, "residential price tags in Chestnut Hill have gone up in recent years. But let's be real—the area was never particularly known for its affordability. The posh private schools and country clubs with lush golf courses always reigned supreme.[91] Boston is a quarter of the size of Chicago and Boston College is rooted in a wealthy neighborhood, which also contributes to neighborhood engagement. Each of the 27 Jesuit colleges and universities are impacted

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[89] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.
[90] Elvia Malagon and Pat Nabong, "Rogers Park: Glimpses of a neighborhood that reflects Chicago's diversity more than any other," *Chicago Sun Times,* May 27, 2022, https://chicago.suntimes.com/2022/5/27/23138736/rogers-park-chicago-neighborhoods-census-diversity.
[91] Megan Johnson, "So You Want to Live in Chestnut Hill," *Boston Magazine*, July 2023, https://www.bostonmagazine.com/property/chestnut-hill-neighborhood-guide/.

by their location and cultural makeup of the city they are in. Despite these differences, Jesuit institutions still find commonality among its purpose, mission, and values.

Driven by that desire to unite the various institutions of Jesuit higher education in the United States, the Society of Jesus established the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. The organization's website describes its purposes as

> (AJCU) is a national organization that represents Jesuit higher education among its various constituencies; provides a forum for the exchange of information and experiences in Jesuit higher education; and encourages and facilitates collaborative initiatives among its member institutions. Those initiatives include: fostering Jesuit, Catholic identity and mission; educating for a faith that does justice; supporting national, international and online collaborations between campuses; and sponsoring professional and leadership development programs.[92]

The AJCU holds meetings or conferences for a wide range of roles, including presidents, Directors of Campus Ministry, student leaders, Student Affairs professionals, mission officers, and so forth. These spaces provide opportunities for strategizing with others doing similar work with similar approaches and missions, while also giving room for a sharing of ideas for programming and engagement. A large initiative of the AJCU that is focused on mission formation for employees is called the Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP). The program's website states that its goal "is to provide a solid intellectual foundation as well as opportunities for participants to personally experience and appropriate their significance so they may better articulate, adapt, and advance the Jesuit & Catholic mission of their campuses."[93] This program works toward these goals through a variety of primarily communal experiences like service immersion trips, silent retreats,

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[92] "History and Mission of AJCU," Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Accessed July 2023, https://ajcunet.edu/about/colleges-universities/.

[93] "Advancing Partners in Mission for the Future of Jesuit Higher Education," Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Accessed July 11, 2023, https://ajcunet.edu/formation-programs/ignatian-colleagues-program/.

and other gatherings. The community elements and networking opportunities are at the heart of this program, particularly as most participants are in upper-level positions and identified by their own institutions as current or future leaders within the network. ICP demonstrates an approach to mission formation for employees regardless of faith or religious identity. Employees are able to participate if they are religiously unaffiliated and an effort is made to consider, recognize, and include participants who fall in this category. These are just a few examples of ways the network provides collaboration and support for one another. With the AJCU just over 50 years old, the opportunities and gifts of this organization are not exhausted.

Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm

Another element of mission in Jesuit higher education is the use of the Jesuit educational pedagogy and paradigm. The use of this approach to education is accessible for faculty and staff within the community, as it mirrors the gifts of Ignatian spirituality while being focused on the intellectual tradition rather than a faith or spirituality context. Xavier faculty member Sharon Korth explains this process concretely as:

> The Ignatian pedagogical process includes the following elements: **context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation**. Through consideration of the factors and context of students' lives, faculty create an environment where students recollect their past experience and assimilate information from newly provided experiences. Faculty help students learn the skills and techniques of reflection, which shapes their consciousness, and they then challenge students to action in service to others.[94]

Each of the elements that Korth identifies are key components within what it means about *how* people are invited to engage with Jesuit education rather than *what* they are invited

[94] Sharon Korth, "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," Post for Xavier University Website, Accessed July 22, 2023, https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/programs/documents/Korth-PrecisofIgnatianPedagogy.pdf.

to learn. Upon completion of this process, the understanding of evaluation becomes the context in the next cycle of this pedagogy, leading those involved into an unending and lifelong learning process.

The first element of Ignatian educational pedagogy is context. As noted in previous sections, the understanding of context is important in one's spiritual life, to their understanding of how they relate to others, the ways in which they are called to serve their respective communities, and to how the specificity of Jesuit education is enacted. Ignatian educators are invited to "recognize how the time and space we occupy, and the socio-geo-political happenings of our day have relevance for our teaching and students' learning. Context is constantly evolving and therefore must be under on-going consideration."[95] Context is about naming the particularities of any given situation and leaning into the freedom that comes from abandoning assumptions that things remain stagnant rather than dynamic. While the naming and understanding of context contributes to the integration of new knowledge, this attentiveness to context also contributes to the creation of a community of belonging. Becoming conversant with the life experiences of others demonstrates "personal care and concern for the individual, which is a hallmark of Jesuit education."[96] Some life experiences will be consistent among the group, like the cultural context and the institutional reality of the institution (Ex. Faculty, staff, and students living in the same geographical location); while others will be unique to each individual, including their life experiences, identities, and what knowledge they already acquired prior to this learning opportunity. Faculty, staff, and students alike are invited to

[95] Bridget Colacchio, "What is Ignatian Pedagogy?," Post for Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy, Accessed July 15, 2023, https://www.luc.edu/fcip/ignatianpedagogy/whatisignatianpedagogy/.
[96]John English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach," (presentation, The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), 1993): 14.

understand their own context, and the willingness to learn and pay attention to the of others is necessary for the depth of educational possibility in this paradigm.

The second element of this pedagogy is experience. According to Fr. John English's *Document on Ignatian Pedagogy*,

> Ignatian experience goes beyond a purely intellectual grasp. Ignatius urges that the whole person – mind, heart and will – should enter the learning experience. Thus, affective as well as cognitive dimensions of the human person are involved, because without internal feeling joined to the intellectual grasp, learning will not move a person to action.[97]

A major component of the Spiritual Exercises is the movement from the intellect to the affect in an understanding of one's encounter with God. This movement is mirrored in the Ignatian educational pedagogy. For Ignatius, experience "meant to taste something internally."[98] Paying attention to one's experience is pivotal to living fully, with or without a religious life. This contributes to the process of meaning making, discernment, and discovering the desires of one's heart. Rooting education in one's lived experience, either direct or indirect, helps make the learning relevant and more easily accessed in the future. Religious educator Thomas Groome roots his praxis in one's experience and memory. In his classic work, *Sharing Faith*, he wrote, "I am convinced that a conative pedagogy, adequate to educate in the wisdom of lived Christian faith and human freedom needs the philosophical foundation of an epistemic ontology."[99] An effective wisdom-driven approach to education is rooted in the insights one already has gleaned because of their experiences. An Ignatian educator understands this priority and also processes their own experiences in order to build capacity to invite others into this process. The benefit

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[97] English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy," 17.
[98] English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy," 14.
[99] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 85.

of responding to one's experience is available to all engaged in the educational process of seeking truth. As Dean Brackley S.J. wrote,

> Discovering truth requires reason integrally considered – that is, rooted in experience and practice and nourished by contemplation, affectivity, and imagination. Only such an 'enriched reason' that engages the whole person – intellect, will, and emotions – produces wisdom.[100]

The ultimate goal of this pedagogy is the seeking of wisdom over factual knowledge for all involved.

Combining the context and lived experiences leads to the process of reflection in the Ignatian educational pedagogy. John English defined reflection as "the term to mean a thoughtful reconsideration of some subject matter, experience, idea, purpose or spontaneous reaction, in order to grasp its significance more fully. Thus reflection is the process by which meaning surfaces."[101] Reflection in this third step serves two purposes; the first in making meaning of what has been, which includes the knowledge acquired, how the individual responded to the experience, and considering what implications this new knowledge has on the individual's understanding of self and role in the world. The second purpose is to imagine and discern how to approach the fourth step of action. The inclusion of imagination makes this reflection particularly Ignatian. Imagination is a key form of prayer in the Spiritual Exercises. One is invited to imagine the world they want to see as part of the motivation for the work needed to be done to achieve that world. Additionally, reflection in this context is the educational and lived version of discernment found in the Spiritual Exercises. Reflection is the heart of Ignatian education, and the space in which "we can deepen our learning and discover even more occasions to lead

[100] Brackley, S.J., "Higher Standards," Pg. 191.
[101] English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy," 18.

truly extraordinary lives."[102] Reflection is seen throughout a variety of contexts, as there is an invitation to pay attention and discern in every context of Jesuit education.

Informed by the reflection of context and experience, an individual is then available and compelled to act in response to the new knowledge. Again, this movement has its roots in the Spiritual Exercises, as one of the graces sought is the freedom to respond to God's love in one's own life. In the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius wrote, "Love ought to be put more in deeds than in words."[103] The goal and fruit of Ignatian education is the informed action the individual will then freely choose. The person's interior development leads to an external behavioral decision, as the previous steps "have been interiorized, made part of the person, impelling the [person] to act, to do something consistent with this new conviction."[104] The specificity of Ignatian education is the expectation that there will be action and that this particular action will not be entirely self-focused or selfishly motivated. According to ICP Director, Joe DeFeo, "The action resulting from immersion in the Ignatian paradigm/process is expected to be one that better serves those in need, that promotes the common good, and that manifests the students' becoming 'men and women for others'."[105] The actions discerned will be rooted in a contribution to bringing about a world of justice, peace, and love, demonstrating the call to action given in the 20th century Jesuit higher education documents and the impact Jesuit education can have more broadly to all people, not simply those who have access to Jesuit education. Educators do well to demonstrate this component of the Ignatian

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[102] Colacchio, "What is Ignatian Pedagogy?."
[103] Fleming, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, 138.
[104] English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy," 21.
[105] Joseph DeFeo, "Old Wine in New Skin: Ignatian Pedagogy, Compatible with and Contributing to Jesuit Higher Education." (PhD diss, Fordham University, 2009), 51-52.

educational pedagogy in actions and in words. The educator can bring all their own identities and experiences, discernments and reflections, and subsequently their own choices to act to the educational setting as the individual both explicitly and implicitly encourages and expects this shared behavior from others.

Finally, the last component of this pedagogy is assessment. Assessment is not foreign to the Ignatian world, as the Examen is a type of assessment tool that focuses on one's daily life, considering the gifts and graces of one's day, as much as the challenge, mistakes, and frustrations. Assessment of action incorporates an honest and free look at the successes of the action as much as what went wrong and where there are opportunities to improve moving forward. This type of evaluation also takes into consideration the "change or growth in the students own human development, such as their increased sense of awareness, biases, and attitudes they now have toward the subject material."[106] These changes and/or growth become part of the context of the individual when the Ignatian educational cycle begins again. As in the Examen, a person is invited to consider their personal growth as much as the impacts of one's mistakes on others and the wider community. This assessment invites an honest critique of how the specifically discerned action impacted the lives of others as much as the individual themselves. Considering themselves and others is not the only unique quality of this type of assessment. Additionally, Ignatian assessment or evaluation continues to take into consideration the care of the whole person and an understanding of the context of the individual. As John English wrote, assessment "must take into account the age, talents and developmental levels of each student. Here the relationship of mutual trust and

[106]DeFeo, "Old Wine in New Skin," 52.

respect which should exist between students and teachers sets climate for discussion of growth."[107] Assessment is not done within a vacuum or done with an intention of only pointing out flaws. This assessment exists within a system of care and a community of belonging where one can receive feedback from an assessment without feeling threatened or denigrated. It is in this context and because of these new experiences that the cycle starts over, as one brings the same tools of discernment and reflection to the current circumstances and time with the hope of continued learning and action moving forward.

In conclusion, many factors contribute to making the academic component of Jesuit education unique and a component of mission. These factors include a commitment to excellence across disciplines and areas of the university, an engagement with authentic dialogue, a celebration and participation in a wider Jesuit educational network, and the utilization of Ignatian educational pedagogy. Within each of these elements of academic branding or identity, the themes of experience, context, and relationships remain consistent. This is especially true within the Ignatian educational pedagogy which names these themes as specific steps of the process. Each institution will appropriate these themes and qualities in unique ways, but there is a shared vision and understanding of its foundation. Again, while this approach to education is rooted in a Jesuit and Catholic identity, a commitment to this style of education is not dependent on the faith tradition or spiritual identity of the educator. If the colleges and universities embrace Ignatius' message that love ought to show itself more in deeds than in words, the evaluation of the success of the education lies in the how of education and the ways students appropriate these values in their lives rather than by a statement of belief. Individual educators from

[107] English, S.J., "Ignatian Pedagogy," 21.

any background are able to commit to and facilitate this approach to education. Seeing academic excellence as mission-driven gives employees another way to see themselves as mission animators from whatever background they identify with, contributing to their own sense of success and belonging.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities meet their goals and strategic vision most effectively when those goals and vision are set by a specific mission to root the short term and long-term work. Tunney explained,

> Mission matters in every organization and structure. Everything needs a mission and a focus and a plan rooted in that mission in order to actualize their reason for being. At Jesuit schools, our mission carries our heart and soul, the reason for the place's existence in the first place.[108]

Mission at Jesuit schools is not just about getting the proper semantic statement that is catchy and checks a box. The foundation of mission at Jesuit schools is that education is a ministry, an apostolate of the Society of Jesus, and the desire to work in these environments is an authentic call to serve. Mission within Jesuit schools has the opportunity to provide an educational experience for students, faculty, and staff that ideally will transform all those involved to be more outwardly focused and aware of the contributions they can make to the greater world. Being upfront and clear about what mission is, where it comes from, and how it is lived in a contemporary way helps recruit individuals that are open to this type of learning and want to contribute to the end goal alongside other colleagues in this work. Hellwig wrote, "A university or college that states its identity and character clearly in its literature and takes care that admission

[108] Tunney, S.J., Interview.

personnel understand and support this statement, will certainly attract both faculty and students who are attuned to the institution's expectations."[109] Using both words and actions to demonstrate what mission is and why it matters will be more likely to have the individuals within the community to ensure the continuation of the mission in traditional and innovative ways.

This clear articulation of mission sets Jesuit higher education apart from other liberal arts and private colleges and universities, an increasingly more crucial factor as the number of individuals seeking college admission declines. According to higher education researcher Misty Kline,

> The bottom line is that many of the nation's colleges and universities will face declining or stagnant student enrollment rates beginning in about six years, a reality which require a thoughtful, strategic approach to ensure the viability and sustainability of those institutions.[110]

While this demographic shift will not impact elite institutions in the same way, many of the 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States are preparing for what this will practically mean internally while also strategizing on how to continue to be competitive, unique, and compelling for the smaller pool to opt into this mission-driven approach to higher education. Additionally, in light of the great resignation of 2021 and the even previously declining number of individuals continuing to work in higher education, retention of employees necessitates dialogue and action. According to a 2021 report about the higher education workforce, this is due to pay compression, women's pay inequity, and burnout. Given this reality, connecting employees to mission in a way that

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[109] Hellwig, "The Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the Catholic University," 253.
[110] Misty Kline, "The Looming Higher Ed Enrollment Cliff," *Higher Ed HR Magazine,* May 2019, https://www.cupahr.org/issue/feature/higher-ed-enrollment-cliff/.

contributes to their work as benefit added and deepens their sense of belonging will be invaluable in retaining those already trained in living out this mission.

This mission that sets Jesuit institutions apart is both traditional and emerging. On one hand, there is a trove of documents and history that serves as the foundation for Jesuit educational mission, particularly including the wisdom of Ignatian Spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises. Within this body of spirituality, individuals are invited to see the importance of paying attention to one's experience, context, and relationships, animated by Ignatian practices and terminology including *cura personalis*, discernment, presupposition, the Examen, and freedom/attachment. At its core, Jesuit education is person-centered. Robert Mitchell S.J. wrote, "No matter how large or complex the institution, the individual is important and given as much personal attention as humanly possible."[111] The tangible and lived expression of the spirituality comes to life in how individuals are treated within. While the primary focus often begins with that experience for students, it is imperative that this same care is given to staff and faculty, as they are the ones enacting the mission most intimately with students as the ones in the classroom, facilitating research, or coaching a team.

Another way the foundation of mission remains true is the commitment to academic excellence. This is seen in the widespread disciplinary experience of excellence expressed in the student experience of a core curriculum but also in the demonstration of excellence in teaching and scholarship across the spectrum of fields of study for faculty. This teaching and scholarship are not limited to a Catholic doctrinal approach, but

[111] Mitchell, S.J., "Five Traits of Jesuit Education," 111.

catholic in the meaning of the word, embracing a wide range of perspectives but with the end goal to serve the wider community. Hartnett wrote, "Research [in Jesuit education] is informed by a characteristically Catholic confidence in the unity of truth; that is, the conviction that truths of reason are ultimately compatible with truths of faith. For this reason, intellectual inquiry [in Jesuit education] is animated not by a fear of error but by a love of truth and with a deep commitment to academic freedom."[112] A commitment to academic freedom, even within a private and Catholic institution, allows for the development of new ideas and is in alignment with the spiritual value of freedom implicit and explicit in Ignatian spirituality.

On the other hand, a gift of Jesuit mission is that in addition to its foundation and past experiences, the expression of mission continues to adapt and respond to whatever context it is in. Dollard O'Malley shared, "Our mission has an emerging future. There's something distinctive and beautiful that it has somehow maintained its presence in all of our institutions."[113] The mission is, in fact, emerging and adapting as the needs of the communities do the same. The foundational element where this is most easily seen is within the institution's commitment to service, justice, and advocacy in an Ignatian way. A faith that does justice was a 20th century version of a rededication to the past and an invitation to an innovative approach while maintaining the core motivations for why this is imperative to mission. Two clear examples of Jesuit mission at work in the 21st century are the ways universities are appropriating the wisdom of Laudato Si in response to climate crisis and in the example of how Georgetown is working toward reconciliation

[112] Hartnett, S.J., "Transformative Education," 12.
[113] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.

with the descendants of the 272 enslaved individuals that they sold after completing the building of the university. The reality is with the innumerable issues of injustice in our communities, country, and world, there will never be a context that does not invite participation of people who are committed to being for and with others in the work of justice. New ways of living this foundational component of mission will present themselves not just for students, but also for faculty and staff who participate in the work of discernment and attending to their own integration of personal experience and passions.

This presentation of mission in Jesuit education also identifies ways that this form of education is not limited to those who identify as Catholic, as Christian, or as religious. In fact, as Dollard-O'Malley said, "What is distinctive about our mission is that people feel like they can intersect with it somewhere."[114] There are many bridges and access points that are accessible for anyone seeking to connect to it. Because of those spaces, religiously unaffiliated employees are able to find their connection points and translate the values to their own lived identities and experiences. Their unique appropriation of the mission opens unique ways of acting from the mission. Whether in developing inclusive ways of leading an Examen, committing to being people who embrace the presupposition in their work with other employees and with students, or in helping uncover innovative ways of responding to injustice, religiously unaffiliated employees in Jesuit higher education have not exhausted their contributions to this Jesuit apostolate. It is within this mission that those of Catholic and Christian backgrounds are invited to listen to and hear the experiences, context, and relationships that inform religiously unaffiliated employees.

[114] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.

The next chapter sets out to help share the stories and experiences generally and specifically of these members of Jesuit higher educational communities.

Chapter Three: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees in Jesuit Education

Introduction

If communication is always in the mode of the receiver, then the starting point for a strategy about how to include and celebrate religiously unaffiliated employees in Jesuit higher educational mission must begin with studying, listening to, and honoring who these people are individually and collectively. One of the common undercurrents of Jesuit education is the need to pay attention to the context of an individual. To understand religiously unaffiliated people in Jesuit higher education in the United States, one must begin with an investigation of this population in the wider American context. This chapter will focus first on the population of those who do not identify with a religious tradition in the general public. This exploration will consider the shifting trends of American religious identity in the last 50 years, the statistics that are available, the diversity of terminology used to label oneself, some common values within the community, and the assumptions religious people have made about this population that religiously unaffiliated people experience. Anecdotes of individuals will bring these topics to life to provide a foundational starting point before shifting to Jesuit higher education itself.

With this broader context established, the focus will turn to the context within Jesuit higher education. While there is desire to include data regarding employees, or at the very least students, this information is not readily available. While legal issues prevent numbers about employees, information about religious diversity is not documented and not often required for students. In searching for diversity numbers at

colleges and universities, percentages are available for gender, race/ethnicity, full-time vs part-time, in-person vs remote, and geographic diversity. Religious diversity was not represented in general college websites or on the specific websites of the eight Jesuit institutions researched.[115] While it is difficult to name the percentage of employees that identify as religiously unaffiliated due to employment discrimination law, mission officers and formation staff can speak anecdotally to the rise in this population within their respective communities. This chapter will capture the insights and narratives of religiously unaffiliated employees that have found connection, meaning, and a sense of belonging at their place of work due to the Jesuit mission of their institutions. Utilizing the invitations of the Examen, the narratives include both the gifts and challenges of the mission for this population, while also including stories about their initial connections to Jesuit education, how one was invited to understand and participate in the institution's mission, and a variety of other miscellaneous topics.

Before beginning this exploration, it is important to clearly state that this is focused on those without a particular faith tradition, rather than simply someone that is not Catholic and/or not Christian (Ex. Muslims, Jews, Hindus, etc.). In these kinds of discussions, assumptions could be made around a shared understanding of values and faith. With a recognized faith tradition, a reasonable Catholic can lean into the Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate*, which honors "what is true and holy" within other religious traditions.[116] Operating from that understanding enables a freedom to not need to convert

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[115] The 9 institutions, representing 1/3 of the possible American Jesuit colleges and universities include: Boston College, Georgetown University, Loyola University Chicago, Saint Louis University, Santa Clara University, Seattle University, Spring Hill College (named Catholic percentage), University of San Francisco, and Xavier University.

[116] Austin Flannery, O.P., Editor. "Nostra Aetate," *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations,* (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 570-1.

or invite someone into Catholicism, as they already have a connection to the divine. *Nostra Aetate* says, "Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture."[117] This call to encourage spiritual and moral truths in non-Christians is often interpreted specifically for religious non-Christians. However, without that named religious connection, there is a possible interpretation regarding the lack of capacity for that same truth, beauty, and goodness, possibly leading to the perceived need to convert this population. This chapter hopes to go beyond the assumption that those without a religious identity are lacking in values or ethics. Though Ignatius' initial approaches to education does not reflect the presence of those without a faith tradition, a deep value of Ignatian spirituality is the need to adapt and invite, or as Ignatius believed, "that people should be helped to encounter, not to perform."[118] For people of any background to encounter the depth of the Ignatian educational tradition, it must be adapted. This adaptation is possible by both paying attention to and listening to the experience, context, and relationships of importance for those committed to mission that fit this demographic identification.

Religiously Unaffiliated Individuals: Research of the Wider Community

Nationally, the statistics demonstrate a growing number of adults that are leaving or were never affiliated with a religious tradition. According to Pew Research in 2021, approximately three out of every ten adults in the United States is now religiously unaffiliated and "the secularizing shifts evident in American society so far in the 21st

[117] Flannery, O.P., "Nostra Aetate," 571.
[118] Howard Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," *A Jesuit Education Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 205.

century show no signs of slowing."[119] Researcher Linda Mercadante determined that "Each year during the 1990's, 1.3 million U.S. adults became nones."[120] The trend of secularization, departing from a religious tradition, or never having ever been affiliated is not a new phenomenon but something that has continued since the 1960's and 1970's. With 2023 statistics showing that 26.8% of the US adult population self-describes as unaffiliated, the experiences of this population cannot be ignored.

Many factors have contributed to this shifting demographic, ranging from a more individualistic approach to a spiritual life to the specific harm caused by religious traditions.[121] Researcher Joy Bostic notes that, "The right to voluntary association that lies at the heart of the First Amendment creates a climate for religious experimentation and creative identity constructions, especially as a response to conflicts with traditional church settings."[122] 21st century culture invites and celebrates experimentation and a personal journey to understanding one's approach to spirituality and life. At the same time, this culture is immersed in the reality of the Catholic Church's priest abuse scandal, violence and oppression aimed at members of the LGBTQ+ population, and a failure to respond to the concerns of the time, in particular racial justice and climate change. Logic

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[119] Gregory Smith, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," *Pew Research*, December 14, 2021, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.
[120] Linda Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," *Spiritual but Not Religious: Past, Present, Future(s),* (London, Routledge, 2018), 110.
[121] "Religious identification of adult population in the U.S. 2022," Statista, Accessed June 8, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/183817/religious-identification-of-adult-population/#:~:text=Religious%20identification%20of%20adult%20population%20in%20the%20U.S.,an%20additional%2013.6%20percent%20were%20White%20evangelical%20Protestants.
[122] Joy Bostic, "Plurals, hybrids, and nomads," *Being Spiritual but Not Religious: Past, Present, Future(s),* (London: Routledge, 2018), 73.

follows that those who have been most oppressed by religious traditions are more likely to unaffiliate. According to writer Melissa Wilcox,

> The SBNR (spiritual but not religious) approach to spirituality places [itself] within a larger pattern in queer communities, more pronounced for cisgender women and trans people of all genders than it is for cisgender men and possibly for whites than for people of color, at least in the United States.[123]

The concerns of the LGBTQ+ community with the Catholic Church will be discussed later in relationship to a tension between the qualifiers of mission being Jesuit and Catholic.

It is also important to recognize a final component of the national statistics around religiously unaffiliated individuals. Pew Research in 2020 found elevated levels of harassment and discrimination experienced by religiously unaffiliated people. According to this research, "Religious 'nones' – a group that includes atheists, agnostics, and people who don't identify with any religion – were harassed by governments, private groups, or both in 27 countries in 2020, including the United States."[124] This discrimination looks different in the countries represented, and in the United States, the dominant way this presented itself was in a social form. For Harvard University Humanist chaplain, Greg Epstein, he believes this discrimination is rooted in the unknown. He wrote in his book, Good Without God,

> A large part of the problem is ignorance. What we do not understand frightens us. Fear begets prejudice. And not only do most people have no idea who we nonreligious people are, or what we stand for, we also aren't usually able to articulate much about ourselves and our own beliefs. We know what we don't believe. But not what we do. And so we become a blank slate, a convenient place

[123] Melissa Wilcox, "Consuming Spirituality: SBNR and neoliberal logic in queer communities," *Being Spiritual but Not Religious: Past, Present, Future(s),* (London: Routledge, 2018), 132.
[124] Sarah Crawford and Virginia Villa, "Religiously unaffiliated people face harassment in a growing number of countries," *Pew Research*, January 27, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/27/religiously-unaffiliated-people-face-harassment-in-a-growing-number-of-countries/.

> for religious people of all kinds to project their fears about immorality and degeneration.[125]

Epstein names how stereotypes and concerns about this population develop, and because of this are not taken seriously as an actual identity. In the concern for religious freedom seen in 21st century Supreme Court cases, the focus is often on Christians feeling their beliefs are not being respected and/or their freedoms are being removed. However, this experience of harassment is also deeply felt among those who do not believe in a religious tradition as well, a trend that is also increasing. Pew Research found, "In 2020, the number of countries where [religiously unaffiliated] people experienced harassment rose notably."[126] With the call to justice for all people, especially those who are marginalized, it seems that supporting this population is part of the mission of Jesuit education broadly, but certainly within the university communities.

How Religiously Unaffiliated Individuals Identify

Given these statistics, it is also helpful to further explore the nomenclature used within the religiously unaffiliated population. While a consistent term, like religiously unaffiliated, is necessary for this type of project, the reality is that the group of folks that fall under this umbrella span a variety of backgrounds and identities. The first example of this is the term *seeker*. According to Roger Haight, a Jesuit who wrote about an approach of Christian Spirituality for Seekers, "The term *seeker* was defined earlier primarily to refer to those with no explicitly developed religious faith."[127] Some prefer this term, as it names an active participation in looking for something in particular, but at the current

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[125] Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, (United States of America: An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 7.
[126] Crawford and Villa, "Religiously unaffiliated people."
[127] Roger Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 88.

moment, is something unfound. On the other hand, others find this term problematic, as it indicates desire to ultimately affiliate or connect to a spiritual or religious tradition. Haight's approach is rooted in his perception that the term seeker is inclusive of those without religious faith.

Another commonly used phrase connected to this population is *spiritual but not religious* (SBNR). Linda Mercadante, Professor Emeritus of Methodist Theological School in Ohio and researcher of the spiritual but not religious population, writes about the many different categories that exist within the SBNR term. According to her categorization, she includes dissenters (those who have issues with organized religion), casuals (people who engage with religion on an as-needed basis), spiritual explorers (people who like to try a wide variety of practices but move on quickly), seekers (Roger Haight's previous term, but in this case specific to someone actually looking for a spiritual home), and immigrants (those who want to choose something new).[128] Finally, an additional explanation of the SBNR phenomena is to name three categories within the term. Dr. Joy Bostic, professor of Religious Studies and founder of the Africana Studies minor at Case Western Reserve University, writes:

> These categories are: secular humanists or those who do not define themselves as religious and who deny the supernatural and base their views on the world on reason; those who maintain ambiguous connections with religious institutions but still believe in the basic teachings of their native religious tradition; and those who, while not a member of an organized body, still think seriously about spiritual concerns and view themselves as highly active seekers.[129]

Bostic's second category of those who maintain an ambiguous connection with a religious tradition could represent folks who might identify as recovering Catholics,

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[128] Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," 116.
[129] Bostic, "Plurals, hybrids, and nomads," 72.

culturally Catholic, or formerly Catholic. Given feedback from a focus group with mission formation staff and the author's own experience, this is a population common to employees in Jesuit higher education. In a sense, this understanding helps with an understanding of ethos in Catholic spaces, but also depending on one's reasoning for no longer affiliating as naming things as Catholic can cause issues for some. All this to say, religiously unaffiliated as an umbrella is large, and people within each of these categories will encounter religious language with varying levels of openness. It is imperative that those working with individuals who are religiously unaffiliated allow the individual to name the term that feels most authentic to who they are.

Broader Research

Beyond respecting the terminology, a religiously unaffiliated individual uses, hearing the experiences of this population is imperative to developing a strategy for supporting and honoring them. This involves hearing the stories of success and connection *and* being able to hear the moments of exclusion or frustration with the treatment received due to their religiously unaffiliated identity. On a broad level, this could invite hearing of why individuals have left specific religious traditions. For example, consider the story of 20th century American author, James Baldwin. James Baldwin, a Black queer man and a Civil Rights activist, ended up leaving his young adult commitment to Christianity. Bostic named that "Baldwin…believes that too often there exists a vast difference between the ministry of Jesus and the tone and tenor of white Western Christianity."[130] An honest critique of Christianity must acknowledge the ways power has been used over others, particularly in the context of race. James Baldwin saw

[130] Bostic, "Plurals, hybrids, and nomads," 75.

hypocrisy in this power differential and spoke about this in an article he wrote for the New Yorker in 1962. Baldwin's experiences led him to write, "But God…is white. And if His love was so great, and if He loved all His children, why were we, the blacks, cast down so far? Why?"[131] Why would someone choose to remain within a tradition of faith that denigrates their very personhood? Baldwin had a reckoning with Christianity for this reason and because of his experience with a sexual rigidity and separation of body and spirit that did not align with the joys and gifts of his life. He wrote,

> It is not too much to say that whoever wishes to become a truly moral human being (and let us not ask whether or not this is possible; I think we must *believe* that it is possible) must first divorce himself from all the prohibitions, crimes, and hypocrisies of the Christian church.[132]

Baldwin's separation from institutional Christianity did not prevent his engagement with values associated with faith. Despite his disenchantment with his experience of church, "Baldwin mines the theological and ethical resources within Afro-Protestantism to ground his humanism in the power of religion as black cultural production created in response to black suffering."[133] His humanism incorporated the values and experiences of his religious upbringing without an explicit connection to a religion. He made incredible contributions as a writer, orator, and Civil Rights activist.

Another example of someone who transformed a connection to organized religion is Janice Dean Willis. While she grew up Baptist, she shifted to Buddhist practices and eventually became a professor of religion at Wesleyan University. Due to the dualism of her encounter of Christianity, "Janice Dean Willis learns that as a female exercising the

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[131] James Baldwin, "Letter from a Region in My Mind," *The New Yorker*, November 9, 1962, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/11/17/letter-from-a-region-in-my-mind#:~:text=It%20is%20not%20too%20much,hypocrisies%20of%20the%20Christian%20church.
[132] Baldwin, "Letter from a Region."
[133] Bostic, "Plurals, hybrids, and nomads," 76.

power to use her voice and to question the world around her, she would be demonized by authority figures who want her to be quiet and that not use her intellect to challenge them."[134] While James Baldwin felt a dismissal of sensual things and a disconnect between the teachings of Jesus and the practices of the church, Janice felt her own identity as a woman being minimized. Rather than inviting her to the fullness of life and engaging with her intelligence and voice, she was asked to be quiet. This experience of not feeling accepted because of a variety of identities is part of what can lead some to leave organized religion, as well as what prevents some from approaching or desiring a connection in this capacity. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman of Boston University commented about her own research,

> Like some modern social theorists, from Marx to Foucault, the secularists and disaffiliated among our participants often see organized religion as an oppressive power, depriving individuals of personal and political freedom; and like Enlightenment philosophers for multiple centuries, they pit religious belief against reason.[135]

Themes of oppression, lack of freedom, and harm are consistent across fields of study. Ultimately, these issues contribute to the increasing numbers of religiously unaffiliated individuals in the United States. These people, "Those traveling the path of disbelief not only find that organized religion holds no appeal (even if they sometimes find its services and rituals comforting) but have also arrived at an intellectual conclusion that God may not, does not, or cannot exist."[136] This conclusion is one not seen as a problem to fix for these folks, but as a lived reality. In fact, Mercadante commented in her study about SBNRs, that

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[134] Bostic, "Plurals, hybrids, and nomads," 78.
[135] Nancy T. Ammerman, "Spiritual But Not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2, (June 2013): 275.
[136] James Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 34.

> Religious leaders say to me, 'Please tell us how to reach the SBNRs because, deep down, they really should be our people.' Nearly everyone who invites me wants a piece of the SBNR pie. I have to let each of them know that this SBNR pie doesn't really want to be eaten…at least not by any kind of organized group.[137]

Rather than seeing religiously unaffiliated people as a problem to be solved, or a project to save, religiously unaffiliated people bring their own values and gifts to a community.

Common Values

While several common values have been uncovered in interviews and studies of religiously unaffiliated individuals, there is obviously a range of how those values are interpreted. As Mercadante wrote,

> My research reveals that belief – rather than being ancillary or unimportant – is a critical aspect of the SBNR ethos and cannot be taken out of the equation. This boundary-setting rhetoric has a purpose beyond the re-sacralization of everyday life. Instead, it is one that specifically allows its participants to carve out new theological territory.[138]

Her interviews brought forward this understanding of belief and faith. However, this is not always the case. Suzanne Matson, an agnostic faculty member at a Jesuit university shared her experience of being invited to a conference involving the broad term of faith. She shared that in her experience of preparing for Collegium (a national conference to explore how Catholic mission is integrated in Catholic higher education), "The word 'faith' started me checking my mental pockets with alarm: I don't have it, I don't think I've ever had it. Have I? Such is the position of the agnostic: nothing is final, not even doubt."[139] Language around faith and belief were anxiety producing for Matson, as the semantics of the dialogue were unfamiliar to her.

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[137] Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," 122.
[138] Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," 112.
[139] Suzanne Matson, "Collegium, Catholic Identity, and the Non-Catholic," *A Jesuit Education Reader*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 240.

Another common value seen among religiously unaffiliated individuals is a perception of humanity and the capacity for good. According to Mercadante, "The very first thing each interviewee said when I asked them, 'What does it meant to be human?' was 'Everyone is born good.'"[140] A hopefulness and optimism about the human condition is seen within a variety of research. Comparing this research to Matson's personal narrative of being agnostic in a Jesuit, Catholic institution affirms this proposition. She comments that during her interview process to work at Boston College, she was asked to comment about how she would see herself fitting into the community. She wrote, "I said something about feeling myself to be in alignment with what I perceived to be the intellectual and humanitarian values of the Jesuits."[141] There is a commitment to honoring the human person and wanting to contribute to a humanitarian worldview.

Despite some perceptions that those without religion lack a moral or ethical compass, this commitment to honoring humanity can translate into some of the same expressions of seeking goodness found in religious traditions. For example, the golden rule is often cited as something that is shared in interfaith dialogue as a staring place of commonality. As Humanist chaplain Epstein points out, "Yes, do unto others is a concept that essentially no religion misses entirely. *But not a single one of these versions of the golden rule requires a God.*"[142] Those who do not identify with a religious tradition can seek the golden rule in its totality in their own lives. The same commitment to humanity also leaves room for dialogue and development of an ethical approach to life. Epstein also wrote, "If a given religious precept can help lead to a good life and a good society,

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[140] Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," 119.
[141] Matson, "Collegium, Catholic Identity, and the Non-Catholic," 240.
[142] Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, 115.

we may adopt it. But we feel no special allegiance to laws created in an earlier time, to deal with earlier problems."[143] He shares this in an attempt to respond to the perception that those without religion lack a moral code to navigate the complexity of life. While a belief in God is not what motivates someone to behave morally, a belief in the possibility of goodness within humanity can deeply guide religiously unaffiliated people's behavior.

A third and final value seen commonly within this community is the value of independence and individualism. Some of this happened alongside a shifting culture that moved the ethos from a communal understanding to an individual one. In a history of shifting American religious culture,

> "Sociologist Philip E. Hammond argues that there was a decisive cultural turn, a 'shift in the meaning of the church from that of a collective-expressive agency to that of an individual-expressive agency. He sees the increased personal autonomy as bringing about a major alteration in the relationship between organized religion and culture and an inevitable loss of religious custodianship over core values.[144]

This shift was happening within and external to religious culture, but the impacts made a significant impact. At a time when culture was responding to the oppression seen in society (racism, sexism, homophobia, and so forth), the pendulum swung toward a space that attempted to honor freedom and independence for all people. With organized religion representing structures that caused this harm, a pushing away from the institutions seems inevitable. The focus of one's own individual and unique journey outside of a religious tradition does not necessitate a shared sense of responsibility for others or the world. This does not mean that those who are spiritual but not religious do not have a sense of duty or desire to serve the greater community, but simply that they do not have an already-

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[143] Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, 118.
[144] Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 151.

created organization within which to do this work. James Martin comments,

> Overall, being spiritual and being religious are both part of being in relationship with God. Neither can be fully realized without the other…Spirituality without religion can become a self-centered complacency divorced from the wisdom of a community. That's what I'm warning against.[145]

Martin clearly writes that there is a possible danger in the individualistic approach to spirituality completely separated from religion, but not a causation relationship either. Jorge Ferrer and William Vickery, researchers of the SBNR experience, describe some of the dangers of a fully individual understanding of spirituality can be. They wrote,

> Despite the asserted emancipatory and reconciliatory nature of the SBNR experientialism, a pernicious individualistic relativism and hidden exclusivism lurk behind them. Since the spiritual path is taken to be highly unique to each individual, SBNRs often believe that the various spiritual paths are all equally good but for different people…This account can easily lead to a banalization of differences, lack of critical discernment, and even moral perniciousness.[146]

What these researchers demonstrate is a need for duty and community engagement in relationship to a spiritual life, insofar as it respects the uniqueness of others but also refrains from excluding those who are connected to a religious tradition. In summary, a few core beliefs found in wider studies of religious unaffiliated individuals include that of belief (in some kind of definition), commitment to humanity, and independence.

Perception of Religiously Unaffiliated Individuals

Within any marginalized identity, those individuals within the group become acutely aware of the perception of the dominant identity. This reality is true for the religiously unaffiliated group. As mentioned earlier, harassment and discrimination are already statistically relevant in 27 countries in the world, including the United States.

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[145] Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything,* 50.
[146] Jorge Ferrer and William Z. Vickery, "Transpersonal psychology and the SBNR movement," *Being Spiritual but Not Religious: Past, Present, Future(s),* (London: Routledge, 2018), 221.

Understanding this community also asks those in the dominant narrative to explore these stereotypes and assumptions about an identity that is not their own, as well as how these assumptions impact members of this population. Mercadante describes the stereotypes she has encountered personally and on behalf of the group she studies (namely SBNR):

> Salad-bar spiritualists. Narcissistic commitment-phobes. Anti-dogma experience seekers. Victims of religious abuse. Rich white women in yoga outfits. These are some of the stereotypes I've heard about those nonreligious "nones" who self-identify as 'Spiritual but not Religious' (SBNR). Having been an SBNR myself, and knowing many SBNR's for years, I have long felt these hyperbolic labels do an injustice to the thoughtful, determined spiritual questers the SBNRs often can be. To dispel the stereotypes SBNRs need to speak in their own voices and be heard. They deserve our attention because they are rapidly contributing to a profound change in the spiritual narrative in the United States.[147]

Her suggestion is to encourage those with this identity to speak up and have their voices heard. The hope is that this project will aid in this quest to elevate the voices of this community.

Specific to the experience of religiously unaffiliated folks within Jesuit higher education, Matson's narrative remains relevant. She wrote about hearing the claim in an article by Kevin O'Brien, S.J. (a 21st century Jesuit involved in leadership within Jesuit higher education) that Jesuit education needed to focus on hiring faculty committed to the agenda of the Catholic Church. While he would likely nuance this comment depending on the audience, she wrote, "That sentence alone in O'Brien's essay shifts me from feeling myself to be integral in my university community to being someone on the non-'critical' margins."[148] Her perception of this desire for faculty was that she could not contribute in the same ways as those who are practicing Catholics. While some of this stems from her own encounters and understanding of the Catholic Church, nuance seems

[147] Mercadante, "Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious," 110.
[148] Matson, "Collegium, Catholic Identity, and the Non-Catholic," 239.

ever more important. A third and final example of the narrative about religiously unaffiliated individuals from those within Christianity comes from within the Ignatian tradition. Theology professor, Ronald Modras wrote "Conversation with people committed to a secular, post-Christian, or postmodern culture is not easy. GC34 admitted that it's threatening – but it is equally indispensable." [149] [150] Hearing that dialogue with someone from this background being described as difficult or threatening does not sound invitational or free for possibility. This very topic was discussed almost 30 years ago in the General Congregation of the Society of Jesus at the beginning of the trend of secular numbers rising.

Some of the narratives are attempting to honor and recognize contributions of religiously unaffiliated folks within works of service often associated with religion. In *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, James Martin, S.J. spends time articulating that his most popular work was meant for a wide audience, including those who are religiously unaffiliated. He celebrates their ability to critique religion from the outside, as well as align with the values of justice and care sometimes associated with a religious tradition. He wrote,

> The cardinal benefit of this group is that they take none of the bland reassurances of religion for granted. Sometimes they have thought more deeply about God and religion than some believers have. Likewise, sometimes the most selfless people in our world are atheists or agnostics. The "secular saint" is real. They also have a knack for detecting hypocrisy or lazy answers: a religious-baloney detector.[151]

Martin honors the spiritual quests of this population, which can include intellectual

[149] GC 34 is a shorthand for the General Congregation 34 of the Society of Jesus, which took place in 1995 in Rome.
[150] Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism,* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), 305.
[151] Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything,* 35.

pursuits, the selfless acts of service and justice done outside a religious tradition, and a distinct perspective on what is unfolding within religion generally. In a similar spirit, Modras focuses on this population and names the reality of its engagement with Ignatian things in contemporary times versus the time of Ignatius. He wrote,

> Ignatius would have found it difficult to accept that people could live spiritual, grace-filled lives outside the confines of explicit Christian faith. But both the spirituality that bears his name and the Catholic Church to which he was so fiercely attached have come to accept that conclusion…There are people working for justice, reaching out in love, living lives of grace – outside the church, but inside a spiritual communion that takes a spiritual humanism to recognize.[152]

Naming that Ignatius himself would have struggled with this is helpful in that it represents the tension that exists within this topic. Also, despite this tension, it is the pedagogy and spirituality of the Ignatian tradition that welcomes the tension and possibility instead of depending on the opinion of one man. If love is demonstrated more in deeds than in words, both Martin and Modras honor the ways those without a religious tradition are representing love, mission, and tradition in their deeds even if their words would be something different than those affiliated with religious traditions.

Within Jesuit writing and pedagogy, there are others who try to name the experience of those without a religious tradition. In his book, *Ignatian Humanism*, Modras seeks to demonstrate the relevance of Ignatian spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises to those who are not religious. Describing this population, he wrote,

> Our postmodern contemporaries have given up on God-talk. We can't ignore the critical questions raised by our agnostic interlocutors or answer them in a traditional language utterly foreign to their experience. We can still speak, however, of the absolute mystery, rooted in a mystical tradition that speaks only of a God beyond images and words.[153]

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[152] Modras, *Ignatian Humanism,* 306.
[153] Modras, *Ignatian Humanism,* 305.

Modras is also recognizing and honoring the critique of religiously unaffiliated individuals rather than dismissing the concerns because they are outside the tradition. In the desire to welcome and celebrate those without a religious tradition while remaining authentic to one's religious tradition, there is tension in how to hold these two things. In a desire to welcome in, there is the possibility of projecting one's own perception or language onto someone uninterested in this approach. For example, Karl Rahner, S.J. is widely known for the use of the term "anonymous Christian." On one hand, his idea that there are those who, due to life circumstances and grace, are living within the grace of God and achieve salvation without being Christian. This led to controversy that a priest would imply salvation was possible without Christ. However, a lesser discussed concern with this term is how someone not Christian would respond to being called an anonymous Christian. Someone who specifically lives their life outside the Christian community might not want to be called an anonymous Christian any more than a Christian would want to be called an anonymous atheist. Given this context, it is helpful to look at two approaches to inclusion of religiously unaffiliated folks.

Inclusion of Religiously Unaffiliated Individuals

Roger Haight's description of spirituality for those outside a faith tradition opens possibilities with an assumption that all people have a spirituality. He wrote,

> "Spirituality may be defined as the logic, or character, or consistent quality of a person's living insofar as it is measured before ultimate reality…the conception remains open and inclusive: according to it, everyone has a spirituality even when they are not conscious of it, as long as they have a relatively consistent character and identity at all.[154]

[154] Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola,* 77.

This definition of spirituality allows for movement, uniqueness, and speaks to general human values at its root. This definition does not have an ulterior motive or desire to change how someone approaches themselves and the world. However, compare this to an often-quoted idea from Ignatius written and spoken of in parish ministry, educational settings, and a variety of other Jesuit apostolates. According to Joe Paprocki, Religious Educator and writer for Loyola Press (a Jesuit publishing company), "St. Ignatius taught that the most effective way to persuade someone to your way of thinking is to *"enter through their door but be sure to leave through your door."*[155] While this quote is used as a demonstration of "meeting people where they are at", it could indicate a desire to change their respective direction to be in alignment with the one representing the Ignatian tradition. Nuance is necessary in this context as well. The desire to have someone encounter an Ignatian way of proceeding and to experience the gifts of this spirituality and pedagogy is different when the one being invited to it has the freedom to integrate or adapt those ideas in their own unique way. However, that phrase can also sound manipulative, as if the purpose in entering the conversation is to change the other, rather than approaching a dialogue or encounter with humility and openness for the actual place the individual is at. These kinds of narratives can contribute to religiously unaffiliated individuals feeling as though they are not accepted authentically as they are. All of these topics contribute to their experiences, especially as employees.

[155] Joe Paprocki, "The Ignatian Key to Opening Doors of Faith," Post for Loyola Press: Catechist Journey. Posted September 15, 2023. https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2013/08/the-ignatian-key-to-opening-doors-of-faith-or-going-contagious-with-ignatius/#:~:text=St.%20Ignatius%20taught%20that%20the%20most%20effective%20way,real%20lived-experience%20of%20those%20to%20whom%20we%20preach.

Religiously Unaffiliated Individuals – Conclusion

The first half of this chapter has been focused on gathering research about those who are religiously unaffiliated. Within this research, there is statistical data, historical context, a focus on nomenclatures within the community, an acknowledgement of the values often found within this group, narratives of why some individuals opted to leave organized religion, and a look at the perceptions and assumptions others say about this population. Within this general knowledge, there have been a few connections specifically to Jesuit higher education, particularly with the complexity of holding both Jesuit and Catholic as identifiers of the tradition. This context lays the foundation for the narratives shared through focus groups and interviews of those who are religiously unaffiliated and currently working within Jesuit higher education.

Religiously Unaffiliated Employees in Jesuit Higher Education Focus Group

While the parameters of this project limit the number of individuals involved in focus groups and interviews, the participation in the focus groups yielded insight, wisdom, and an opportunity to listen to individuals that both identify as religiously unaffiliated and work in Jesuit higher education. These individuals were recruited by mission officers in their respective institutions both because of their religiously unaffiliated identity and because of their demonstrated commitment to Jesuit mission. Therefore, this population can speak to frustrations, celebrations, concerns, and stories that represent what it is like to hold these identities. They speak from their own experiences and knowledge, but also are not asked to represent every person who holds these identities. These focus groups did not include those disconnected or unwilling to engage with mission. The space allowed for discussions about what brought these people

to Jesuit education in the first place, how the mission of Jesuit higher education was introduced to them, how they define mission, the gifts and challenges of mission for them as religiously unaffiliated individuals, the contributions they believe they have made, and dreaming about the possibilities for formation and support of this community. While these individuals will remain nameless, they represent seven different universities from three different time zones, and consisted of four women, two men, and one non-binary individual. They represent individuals who have been working in Jesuit higher education for less than a year to having more than 15 years of experience. Finally, this group make-up includes staff, non-tenured faculty, and tenured faculty. Through the stories and insights specific to experiences in Jesuit higher education, the research from the focus groups can help flush out this reality and contribute to a more meaningful and respectful way of doing mission formation with this population moving forward.

Origin Stories

Throughout the focus groups, it became clear that every individual has their own unique origin story about what brought them to Jesuit higher education. While those who are Catholic or Christian may seek out the space because of its religious connection, or those who are Muslim or Jewish may seek out this space because of the honoring and value of religious experience itself, those without a religious tradition can come without a connection to the religious identity of the institution. The individuals in the focus group shared their stories freely, proudly, and with a sense of gratitude within their voices. For some, there was a familiarity of Catholic environments, such that the individuals had enough context to feel comfortable applying. One person shared, “I grew up in and around Christianity, so I knew I knew enough to walk the walk and relate to students.

Knowing a little bit about Jesuit education and it being far enough dissociated from the harsher Catholic aspects, I felt confident."[156] For another, an individual had grown up as an atheist in a traditionally Catholic community outside Boston and had thankfully already experienced acceptance within a similar environment. For both of these individuals, the geography also played a part in their seeking out employment in Jesuit schools. For one, the job allowed the person to move closer to childhood roots and family. For the other, the job was in a city she had already been living in for some time and her job search yielded her current position.

An additional factor that contributed to initial connections to Jesuit higher education was the importance of relationships with those who already had some concept about what that meant. Five members of the focus group spoke about the importance of personal connections to someone they respected that spoke highly of their experience in Jesuit education. These ranged from having a graduate school classmate that was an alum of a Jesuit school who "really focused on getting a job in Jesuit higher education because she swore it meant something deeper than public institutions."[157] Another had family that had worked at a different Jesuit school who shared, "This is really great stuff. This Ignatian pedagogy, whole-person support, and a chance to unabashedly and unashamedly go into classrooms and do the work of dignity and justice, is awesome."[158] Others spoke of mentors and friends speaking to the value of this form of education, and finally, one person had experienced so many students at a public institution that had come through Catholic secondary education. This person was "really impressed by the students that had

[156] Participant 1, Schwer, Lauren, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees in Jesuit Higher Education, July 20th, 2023. 7 participants.
[157] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[158] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

come through Catholic education and their appetite for learning and the excellence of character development in their education."[159] Her relationship to college students with a background like this made her more open to the possibility of working in a Catholic environment without a religious background.

Finally, the last developed theme among this group was the opportunity each job presented on its own. For some, the roles allowed for leadership within their respective fields that had not been available to them in previous public and state institutions. For another, their specific institution has an academic discipline not found in many other places, and the position "allowed me to stay within my specialty, while also rooting my scholarship in social justice issues, something many people would not expect or understand. But I have permission and am expected to do this."[160] A third member of the focus group spoke to having no background or personal connection to Jesuit higher education, no geographic connection to the institution, and was not even working in higher education at the point of his origin story. However, LinkedIn basically brought him to a job outside the private sector that would "let me try and do my part to leave the world a better place after I am gone."[161] The opportunities within the roles and the nature of the work explicitly and implicitly in the job description were compelling enough to bring folks outside the network and religious affiliation in the door. After being aware of what initially brought these individuals to Jesuit higher education in the first place, the group was next asked to share how they were invited to know what the mission itself is about and what their role could be within it.

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[159] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[160] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[161] Participant 3, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

Invitation to Mission

While the hiring process invited each of the focus group members to connect to those in their life with some kind of connection to Jesuit education in their own discernment and general preparation for the interviews, once they began their employment, a true introduction to mission began. Overall, while each person had their own unique introduction based on their institution, the experience was mostly positive, rooted in meaningful connections to colleagues and meaningful programming. The moments of disconnect happened due to the pedagogy used and (lack of) charisma of the presenters in required programs at the beginning of someone's tenure at the universities and colleges. For more than half the group, there was a naming of who at the institution became a conversation partner or mentor around topics of mission. One person remembered,

> My first conversation with my dean demonstrated how important it was to be able to refer to our mission. If I'm honest, I almost felt quizzed on it. I felt a charge to be familiar with it and expanding my notion of the mission beyond what I had learned for my interview.[162]

Another employee shared about a faculty mentor who was "charged to meet with me monthly, with the support of the university, to have conversations about my formation and our culture of transformation."[163] A third individual cited having the chance to meet with mission staff members to just talk and get to know one another, making it safe to ask questions about heavier topics. While these three instances were focused on intentionally inviting someone to build connections and understanding of the mission, the fourth individual referenced the importance of someone who seemed to have some kind of

[162] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[163] Participant 7, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

expertise in mission honoring the work she herself was doing. This individual had considered a mission connection to her work, but simply wanted what she was doing professionally to reflect her personal value in social justice. When she wrote about this in an annual report, she remembers, "Someone came to find me and said, wow, you are really engaged in mission and another person wrote me a note telling me how impressed he was with the ways I was living mission."[164] This affirmation and encouragement invited her to both want to engage even more meaningfully in mission, but also "pulled mission away from a Bible study or a dry document. It pulled mission into what it actually is, with a focus on my actions rather than my words."[165] The personal connections and encouragement seemed most significant to the communication of mission values and creating spaces to develop what living mission looked like for each individual in their unique circumstances.

On top of the gifts of relationships, the other major way these employees continued their development of mission understanding came from programs, both required and optional. The required programming generally took place at the beginning of their employment through either new staff or new faculty orientation. Two staff named their new staff orientation as a place that helped them begin articulating what it meant for them to practically incorporate the mission into their daily work. One faculty shared how their new faculty orientation began with Jesuit history, mission context, and an invitation to consider what makes their work unique being at a Jesuit university. He described the facilitators as having done "a really good job of making it not too overbearing but with

[164] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[165] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

the right balance of information and chance for me to think about how I would carry forward this mission."[166] Unfortunately, another faculty described their required new faculty orientation as "very dry and unappealing, something of the past, and a bit intimidating."[167] The Jesuit that facilitated this particular orientation focused on the history, how the Jesuits influenced the architecture, and its connections to other Catholic parts of their local community. She did not find herself in that experience. However, this employee was grateful a new VP for Mission and Ministry had created the mentoring program described earlier.

Another employee spoke of cohort-based training programs, lasting a year or two with the same groups of colleagues. This type of program is optional and available at any point in a person's career at the institution. This person waited two years before joining this program, which helped him feel like he had ownership of his participation. He remarked, "I'm glad that I waited until I felt that I was ready and knew that even as an atheist, it would be relevant to my work."[168] While optional programs do not reach every employee, the ones who self-select in are committed to engaging the experience and mining the material with regard to their own work and development. The Ignatian Colleagues Program, cited in chapter one and affiliated with the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, also came up as an important cohort model for participation. At their best, the cohort models provide space for meaningful connection with colleagues, personal reflection, and accessible ways of accessing the depth and authenticity of what mission is. One person described it as making space for her "to begin creating my own

[166] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[167] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[168] Participant 3, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

little translation system so that when I was mired in Catholic texts and Christian language, I had authorization to filter it into my own."[169]

The concerns from the focus group members about these programs is when the trainings turn into "Bible school-type experiences, lives of the saints, and so much about the cannonball. One cannonball was interesting, don't get me wrong. But all the time is a lot!"[170][171] Overall though, the cohort models were well received and impactful in terms of someone understanding mission effectively. Finally, a brief note about the ways two of the focus group members participated in an additional, more short-termed group, whether it be a reading group in one case, or a seminar that provided space to more deeply engage some Jesuit concepts and find out "little tidbits that encourage me and others."[172] It was evident from their sharing that the interpersonal connections within this type of programming was a compelling component of the experience and made the openness to learning more exciting and relevant. Keeping the opportunity to build relationships and communicating mission with authentic Jesuit pedagogy is key in inviting individuals into mission, particularly those that are religiously unaffiliated.

The Gifts of Jesuit Mission

Each of the focus group members had the opportunity to share about elements of the Jesuit educational mission that have been gifts in their own professional and personal lives, as well as inviting them to consider how mission has contributed to or harmed their sense of belonging at work. Overwhelmingly, each focus group participant had the ability

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[169] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[170] Participant 3, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[171] A key moment in the life of Ignatius of Loyola is when he was hit by a cannonball in battle. This event led to his conversion and is pivotal when sharing his personal story.
[172] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

to share gifts received and ways that the mission aided their ability to be accepted as themselves in their respective institutions. A few main themes emerged of these gifts and contributions to belonging, namely the primacy of a person-centered, relationship-focused way of being; a genuine engagement with issues of justice academically, programmatically, and individually; and specific insights and practices from Ignatian spirituality.

The first emerging theme is that of how an institution and community demonstrate their comprehensive approach to care for students and with employees. The buzz word many were able to name was that of *cura personalis*. As any of them described how they have received the care that emulates this value and their desire and efforts to embody this value themselves, other individuals kept nodding in agreement. For one individual, *cura personalis* is at the root of Jesuit mission. She shared,

> This is one aspect that everyone can get behind, reflect on, and be able to chat about. It's also something that is shown in so many ways, which makes me want to enact this within my own work. Actually seeing folks really dedicate themselves to putting others first is really awesome.[173]

The demonstration of this value is compelling both because an employee can recognize it and participate in it fully, but also because they can be recipients of its praxis. One element of this is feeling accepted for the identities one holds that are outside of the dominant culture. The member of the group that identifies as non-binary talked about how the values of their institution created a welcoming environment. They said, "The environment is helpful for somebody like me, and others with different identities. I feel a sense of comfort walking around, being myself, expressing myself. This is so reassuring

[173] Participant 7, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

for me."[174] For others, relationships with people who cared for them helped them understand the depth of this value. One individual said,

> Meeting with my faculty mentor, who was the loveliest, grouchy old man from [another country], yet listened to me and encouraged my transition to [the institution] helped me see *cura personalis* was more than just holistic education and allowed people totally different from each other to find a way for authentic connection.[175]

Another commented on the vulnerability of members of leadership, specifically a provost, whose presentation during faculty orientation allowed someone to feel as though they were in a "playing field of music and culture and inclusion."[176] Finally, another participant spoke to the importance of having meaningful relationships with Jesuits themselves, explaining that they became like peers and not someone to blindly respect or give authority to. She recounted conversations she had with a Jesuit colleague who would regularly respond to her own comments about feeling disconnected from the community due to her atheism. His comment to her many times was, "You always start with the caveat that you are not fully part of this place. Stop saying that. You are part of this community whether you want to claim it or not. This had a huge contribution to my sense of feeling connected."[177] The support of that Jesuit was both personally affirming of her sense of place and affirming of her own contributions as well. The person-centered, life-affirming quality of Jesuit education rings true for each of the focus group members.

Another clear theme of this dialogue was the engagement of justice issues. Each of the participants named social justice as a key value of Jesuit education that resonates

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[174] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[175] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[176] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[177] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

within them and has encouraged them to live from this value. A faculty member shared about how his interview process made it clear justice was a priority, but he was impressed that upon arrival, conversation after conversation confirmed this value was more than just lip-service. Individual conversations and approaches to incorporating justice into academic areas demonstrated this in action. One example given was how one faculty member went through an entire syllabus looking for how white supremacy was present within the structures of the class and made significant changes due to the feedback received. Programmatically, another faculty member talked about the celebration of justice causes within her school. At her institution, a famous female athlete was the commencement speaker. She shared that having "this celebrated female athlete speak to the importance of gender pay equity, speak up for the marginalized, and to not be silent when you have more power was this rallying cry for social justice beyond anything I expected at this school."[178] The public celebration of justice issues resonated with another participant who works at Georgetown University, a school previously mentioned as working at reckoning with its history and legacy of slavery at its inception. As someone without a faith tradition, this person shared how surprised they were that the Mass of Contrition GU held both spoke to a commitment to reconciliation and justice, as well as to the creation of a spiritual space that moved her deeply. The person discussed how the mass included descendants of the enslaved people from other parts of the country, that the mass was about reconciliation and remembrance and included "traditional African components like pouring out libations for ancestors and honoring the people who were there. I'll remember that my whole life. When I go to mass, I usually

[178] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

don't participate, I just attend. But this was incredibly powerful."[179] Seeing justice being attempted and lived at individual and university levels helped each of these individuals commit more deeply to their own practices of social justice, but also contributed to them feeling their values aligned with the institution, even without a faith tradition.

Finally, the third theme that emerged was the gift of spiritual practices and insights even though this group was comprised of those without a religious tradition. While this might seem disconnected at first, these individuals have found ways of honoring their own spiritual lives and ways of approaching life through the gifts of Ignatian spirituality. The first practice of this is simply reflection. More than half of the group discussed how reflection happens in virtually every space they are in (with some exceptions). One shared, "Our mission revolves around supporting experience and reflecting on your own place in the world and how it relates to those around you. I've been able to feel a lot of support and recognize that support through the invitation to meaningful reflection."[180] The fruit of reflection is available to anyone who reflects, and underneath the reflection is the gift of silence and retreat. This is the silence that creates space for reflection, to be quiet with one's thoughts and feelings, and also to simply breathe. A participant affiliated with the Ignatian Colleagues Program had recently participated in a 7-day silent retreat. She felt affirmed by her spiritual director who did not force God language on her and allowed her retreat to have "an emphasis on contemplation, moments of silence, moments of quiet, and making a space for me to understand what my place is."[181] An additional layer to reflection, silence, and

[179] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[180] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[181] Participant 7, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

contemplation is the invitation to rest. One faculty member remarked that knowing how many retreats and silent spaces are available to faculty and staff demonstrates how important it is to Jesuit education. She said, "What I hear is that your stillness and inner space and silence matters to us. It's not just a performance of faith, it is about going inside yourself and connecting to something beyond yourself. You can be quiet and do it your own way."[182] These individuals received the gifts of the charism without an expression of faith because of how encouraged and highlighted it was by their respective institutions.

The Challenges of Jesuit Mission

While there are many ways that elements of the mission invited these individuals in, the experience of working in a Jesuit, Catholic institution while being religiously unaffiliated comes with its frustrations and challenges. The discussion and examples provided can be summarized into three major themes: how their identity contributed to self-doubt, feeling excluded because of the religiously unaffiliated identity, and because of the impact of a variety of issues associated with the Catholic affiliation of the institutions. The first of these is the way self-doubt impacted some of the employees. One individual, who had little connection to Jesuit education before the beginning of their employment, was concerned that their religiously unaffiliated identity would prevent them from being able to fully do their job, as if their identity would "prevent students from being able to relate to me or that I wouldn't be able to support the religious aspects of students in a meaningful way."[183] This employee's demonstration of a desire to

[182] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[183] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

embody *cura personalis* with every student they served felt in jeopardy because of their identity. This assumption demonstrates the employee imagined every student they served would have a religious identity rather than considering how they might be a gift to those students that do not have a religious affiliation themselves. Another employee felt comfortable taking a job in Jesuit higher education because the job description she was hired for did not appear to connect to mission. She reflected, "The job was really appealing, and I felt like, well, this won't really be part of my role, so I just need to be conversant enough to not seem opposed to the university's mission."[184] At that point, her understanding of mission was focused on the religious aspect of it, rendering her unable to participate. These moments of self-doubt lingered until they were both invited to re-evaluate their understandings of what it means to animate and participate in mission.

Secondly, everyone in the group was able to name and identify times they felt excluded due to their religiously unaffiliated identity. In some cases, group members understood the natural divide that occurs, particularly in the naming of God in public spaces, in trainings, or in various articulations of what mission is. One person chuckled while sharing, "Part of our mission is to find God in all things. This is obviously an aspect that's a little difficult for someone like me!"[185] This sharing was done with patience and understanding, and the assertion that they are happy to speak to anyone who does have a faith or connection to God. Another person said, "It's so cool to have conversations with people about what they believe in. I would never want anyone not to share about their life and especially things like religion and spirituality are so important

[184] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[185] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

to someone's experience."[186] Although this person's experience was predominantly positive and the language was what caused moments of pause, others shared the feeling of being excluded in particular ways.

Multiple participants commented on the acceptance of non-Catholics and non-Christians if they were still religiously affiliated (Ex. Muslim, Jewish, etc.). One woman shared, "It's more accepted to be any religion than if you are an atheist. When someone says, 'Oh, I'm Jewish,' others respond, 'oh, that's wonderful.' But with me, it feels like my identity is not valid. As if I'm not done figuring this out yet."[187] Almost everyone showed their agreement in some capacity as she shared that. Shortly after this, someone commented on the phrase "meeting people where they are at." He said, "I find this phrase very patronizing and indicating that they want to meet me where I am but then take me somewhere I am not interested in going or where I do not have agency."[188] While some hear that phrase of "meeting people where they are at" and think this is a revolutionary and strategic way of inviting others to mission, particularly as compared to a demand for conversion or blatant disrespect for a different opinion or approach, this group hears that phrase as simply a different approach to trying to change who they are, because who they are is not enough or not acceptable. Within the focus group emerged a conversation about framing, genuine acceptance, and respect for religiously affiliated individuals in religious space.

Finally, two members of the group commented on how their religious identity felt different upon major leadership changes that happened within their institutions. They

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[186] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[187] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[188] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

both had experienced university shifts when their first lay presidents took over leadership of their schools. One commented,

> It feels like there has been more anxiety about our Catholic identity and a deeper drive to be very faith-focused so that it doesn't seem that we've lost our Catholic piece because the Jesuit president is gone. We now have old depression religious artwork coming out of storage and being hung in public spaces to try and claim to be even more Catholic. It feels very different than it did before. Now, it feels less acceptable to not be Catholic.[189]

In the 2022-2023 academic year alone, eight of the 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States inaugurated new presidents, each of which is a lay person. Prior to 2001, every Jesuit college and university was run by Jesuit presidents. This shift in leadership impacts a great deal about how mission is understood, perceived, and lived, and for purposes of this project, directly impacts those employees who are not of a religious background. While the impacts of lay leadership in Jesuit higher education would require a separate research project, the relevance of this topic does impact the religiously unaffiliated community.

The final area of tension for the members of the focus group with mission revolved around parts of the Catholic Church that were in opposition to their own values and perception of justice. There is a sense that the Catholic Church surrendered its moral authority due to the priest abuse crisis nationally and globally. People spoke of the culture wars existing about the separation of church and state and how that shows up in university policy. One employee shared, "There is not a requirement to be Catholic, but there is the understanding that I will adhere to Catholic tradition."[190] It impacts what health care is provided, how they are able to provide for healthy sexual behavior for

[189] Participant 3, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[190] Participant 7, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

students, and what nurses and doctors on campus are able to say to students. A woman employee shared, "I experience a harm in my sense of belonging when my personal views are not supported by institutional policy, which is usually around reproductive justice, reproductive health, and other things that impact women and female identifying individuals."[191] Similarly, an employee that is part of the LGBTQ+ community shared about the discomfort of specifically the Catholic naming of the mission. He shared, "I often feel that I have to name the symbolic exclusion and violence the Catholic Church has used against people in my community."[192] The intersection of multiple marginalized identities contributed to a deeper sense of pain for multiple members of the group. Being religiously unaffiliated and queer or being religiously unaffiliated and a woman seemed to deepen the sense of frustration with this element more deeply because of the direct consequences it has on these individuals.

The last way this pain is felt is through the actions of those within their community. Three different individuals talked about the discrimination and disrespect they have felt from students or other employees who are Catholic that have "narrow ideological perspectives on what our mission is and should be. Some of these folks want mission and identity to be so narrow that it is difficult for most people to participate."[193] This shows up in conversations, in various student protests, and in the celebration of some speakers on campus that directly oppose the rights some of these group members hold dearly. This rigidity has caused pain for multiple members of the group throughout their employment in Jesuit higher education. These themes of doubt, disrespect, and

[191] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[192] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[193] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

concern about the Catholic identity all contribute to the challenges that religiously unaffiliated employees encounter regarding mission.

Self-Identified Contributions to Mission

Despite the frustrations the group encounters, each individual in the group continues to seek opportunities to meaningfully contribute to how mission is brought to life at their institutions. While at first the group was hesitant to respond to the question that asked them to share what they are most proud of with relationship to living mission in your work, what was shared created a space of inspiration and pride. The stories that were shared fell into two categories, that of academic and pedagogical contributions and the other in interpersonal and influence spaces. The three faculty spoke of the ways they utilized the roots of Jesuit educational mission to inform their scholarship within their respective disciplines. One faculty member shared, "I had the chance to develop an Ignatian theater pedagogy. It was a really exciting opportunity that was supported by my institution and demonstrated my own appreciation for and commitment to Ignatian pedagogy."[194] The energy and enthusiasm of the faculty member in this sharing was noticeable. Another example of how the mission informed academics is through a re-envisioning of the entire curriculum of a Department of Communications. This faculty member, also quite animated, reflected,

> My process was truly guided by the question of what it means to be a communications program at a Jesuit school. We refocused the entire curriculum around three pillars of our discipline, namely communication as a meaning making activity; communication and its relationship to power, systems of power, and how it creates systems of power and oppression; and injustice and privilege.[195]

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[194] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[195] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

Both of these professors were able to share the positive reception of these modifications by their peers, as well as the students engaged in their respective fields. Finally, a unique academic contribution to mission was by a scientist that helped align the school's *Laudato Si* initiative with a native plant project. In 2022, she was able to help plant a pollinator garden in a location associated with a tragic event for their particular community. She reflected,

> We tried to build something beautiful. It was beautiful and people in the community who were scared and shocked would come around this garden and talk and smile. A black horticulturalist, Lillian Hughes Savage says, 'we must overbalance ugliness with beauty.' That's what we did.[196]

The commitment was to live from the values of justice, caring for the whole person and community, and supporting the local community. Each of these faculty members called forth gifts of the mission to deepen their institutional mission effectiveness.

The other category of contributions of these employees revolved around *how* they chose to do their work and the interpersonal relationships they have due to the nature of their roles on campus. This category seemed to resonate more with staff and non-tenure track faculty who have less opportunity to influence things like curriculum and classroom pedagogy. One staff member described the invitation to greater depth with regard to their work ethic and ability to put others first despite the difficulty of the times we are living in. They said, "It's a tough world out there these days. I'm proud of myself that every day, I show up. I show up for the students, the people I work with, and to keep aligning myself more deeply with caring for the whole person."[197] This individual continues to seek out new programs and resources to understand the mission better, but at the end of

[196] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[197] Participant 1, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

the day, the main objective is to care as intentionally as possible for everyone they encounter. Another employee shared something similar, that he is "trying to figure out what are the ways I can show up every day as my whole being, in a radically self-affirming, self-loving way that helps create a radically affirming and inclusive space for the rest of the community."[198] Part of the creating of inclusive spaces involved taking advantage of the influence and opportunities they have to be in conversations at various levels, particularly conversations about justice or leveraging their own privileges for people not welcome in the places of dialogue and decision-making. A final example of contribution to mission stems from the focus on the intentionality of individual moments and conversations. This staff member reflected, "I like the idea that I can seamlessly and smoothly bring mission in with the students and my colleagues by incorporating moments of reflection, bringing in Ignatian pedagogy, and doing this in ways that feel accessible to me."[199] She had begun to realize that her own challenges with mission by being someone without a religious tradition helped her be a translator for anyone, not just those who share this identity with her. Each of these contributions bring profound gift to their individual institutions.

Ideas for Additional Support

A final area of discussion for this focus group was that of what resources and programs they would appreciate or seek out in their own ongoing mission formation. Overwhelmingly, they shared a desire for intentional spaces for authentic dialogue. There was appreciation for the spaces already created on their campuses in book clubs, lunches,

[198] Participant 6, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[199] Participant 5, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

seminars, and so forth. One faculty member shared the gratitude for participating in the Ignatian Colleagues Program and hearing people struggle with similar things to her that also happened to be Catholic. She said, "I appreciated the openness to see places where we overlap, which I found more affirming than I expected. I wish we had more spaces like that."[200] There were ideas around atheist affinity spaces to help bring forth safe environments where people did not feel the need to hide their own identity. A faculty member commented that she did not feel comfortable sharing her religiously unaffiliated identity until after she got tenure. She wished there could have been space for her to share this fear with others in similar situations to remove feelings of hiding and isolation. The framing of these spaces matters greatly to this group. One person shared a hope that the space would be affirming of all perspectives and take the approach that "there are different entry points to mission. You come from your own entry point and that is just as valuable as someone who comes from a more traditionally Catholic or other religious entry point. We each bring something of value."[201] There is a desire for humility within the conversation, especially from people with perceived authority or power in dialogues of mission. An employee reflected,

> What doesn't work for me is when mission and faith are something that are promulgated to me from someone who is standing above me, talking down to me, as an ambassador of the whole organization. I love for someone who wants to have conversations with me in which we can learn alongside each other.[202]

The desire to be heard, seen, and respected in the same manner as folks with other religious identities are at the root and heart of the programs that members of this focus group are seeking. Participants in the focus group concluded the shared time by sharing a

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[200] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[201] Participant 4, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.
[202] Participant 3, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

brief statement about what they wish colleagues with religious identities, especially those working in mission formation, would hear and understand about them. The following is the list of their sentiments:

1. I wish there were more inclusion of the atheist/non-religious identity into the way the institution names diversity of experience among students, staff, and faculty.
2. All mission work is good work, even if you're not using God language to describe it or doing it without a faith background motivating you to do so.
3. My lived experience (and those of everyone else bringing non-dominant views and experiences and stories to the community) AND the sense I've/we've made of those experiences is valid and an important part of this community.
4. Not making a safe space for any marginalized group says more than anything in the mission ever can. Action isn't important, it's necessary.
5. I'm not bitter. I'm not here to judge. I don't hold any judgment or resentment towards any specific religious affiliation. I hope folks feel like they can be who they are with me.
6. I feel personally and professionally committed to this mission. My formation won't include a relationship with God, but I hope my formation will include continued growth and investment in a mission that I think deep down can benefit from my approach and voice.

7. Let's just be honest and curious and humble about the fact that we are all doing the best that we can. Isn't that what the presupposition is supposed to be about?[203]

These insights and statements do not need further development or unpacking. A genuine attempt to hear these insights and embrace their meaning could expand and meaningfully improve the experience of religiously unaffiliated employees in all of Jesuit higher education.

Focus Group Reflections and Conclusion

Overall, the focus group experience was one of grace, insight, and wisdom. The faculty and staff representatives of religiously unaffiliated individuals were honest, vulnerable, and transparent. The participants were generous with their time and spirit without compensation or immediately evident benefit to them individually. However, multiple members of the group reached out after the shared time to acknowledge their gratitude for being invited to participate. The gratitude named came from the chance to be with others who shared their identity, having had the space to answer these questions without being afraid of consequences, and ultimately that the research was being done in the first place. As the facilitator, the experience of the focus group was one of awe and gratitude. The assumption was that two-thirds of those confirmed for the group would show up; everyone was there. The assumption was that these individuals were doing a favor for someone at their own school; they were excited to participate. Assumptions were challenged and grace responded. The researcher felt privileged to be able to hear the

[203] Schwer, Lauren. Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

stories and contributions of these individuals and delighted these people have chosen to give their talent and time to Jesuit higher education despite the stereotypes or challenges they meet because of their identities. The stories of initial connection to Jesuit education, introduction to mission, and desires for future formation opportunities affirmed some assumptions going into this project and brought to life new connections and insights that are important for anyone doing faculty and staff formation to consider and embrace. Hopefully, this second half of chapter captures the profound gift that these individuals are in their communities and the deep honor it was for the researcher to witness how they animate mission in Jesuit higher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a wide range of experiences, values, life approaches, and terminology that exists within the umbrella of religiously unaffiliated. This population continues to grow within the United States with no evidence for this trend slowing down. Holding this identity involves being on the receiving end of assumptions, stereotypes that sometimes lead to discrimination, and a perceived need to be saved or claimed within a particular religious tradition. Despite this, research shows a variety of values consistent within members of this population, including some sense of belief generally (in people, themselves, humanity), an understanding of the capacity for good that humans hold and a commitment to honoring the dignity in others, and a sense of freedom and individualism that allows them to honor their own experience and the unique experiences of anyone else. This broader experience of being religiously unaffiliated takes on a particular lens when the individuals are working within Jesuit higher education.

The focus group of religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities brought to life the values unearthed in the broader research, namely that of having belief in humanity's capacity for good, a deep commitment to ethical behavior leading to a more socially just society and community, and an understanding of the importance of spiritual practice that is relevant and accessible to the individual and their appropriation of the respective approach. These common values have led to meaningful, creative, and important contributions to their respective institutions lived expression of mission. By listening to them, those responsible for the formation of faculty and staff can develop more nuanced and impactful ways of working with both this community, as well as those with religious identities more broadly. The next chapter will include the experiences and perspectives of those responsible for mission with religiously unaffiliated colleagues, as well as an exploration of what these roles entail in 21st century Jesuit higher education in the United States.

Chapter Four: Those Responsible for Mission Formation

Introduction

"People are invited to do the work of mission through relationships. It's really simplistic, but that's the truth."[204] Rita Dollard-O'Malley, a woman immersed in the work of mission formation for decades recognizes the primacy of relationships within this context. A key insight of the conversations with religiously unaffiliated employees in Jesuit higher education was the importance of relationships and invitation to understanding mission both for what it is as well as who they are within it. This chapter will focus on those responsible for providing programs and resources surrounding formation in mission to all employees in Jesuit higher education, as well as those tasked with assessing these efforts within their respective provinces.[205] Understanding this population, including understanding the history, context, and purpose of these positions, is necessary in strategizing how those in the roles can most effectively invite and celebrate the mission contributions of their religiously unaffiliated colleagues. Those in these roles come to the work with their own origin stories to Jesuit education, interpretations of what this work is about, and perceptions about who their religiously unaffiliated colleagues are and in what ways they can contribute to the mission. The backgrounds and perceptions of this population need to be explored and understood because of how those influences contribute to the attitude and lived reality of the ways

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[204] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.

[205] The Jesuits in the United States are broken into four provinces, which are USA East Province, USA Midwest Jesuits, Jesuits West Province, and Jesuits Central Southern Province. The provinces each have their own leader, or provincial, leadership structure, traditions, and identities. They all report up to the Jesuit Conference for the United States and Canada.

mission formation staff proceed and either connect or disconnect with religiously unaffiliated colleagues.

Additionally, this chapter will include exploration of the tension between the mission of Jesuit education being Jesuit and Catholic. While many in the Catholic world, and certainly those in mission focused roles, understand Jesuit and Catholic to be inextricably connected, many employees differentiate between these two categories. Often, those responsible for mission formation are tasked with holding that tension, including the need for both listening and responding to those on two sides of a spectrum. The spectrum ranges from those who want no distinction made between Jesuit and Catholic as compared to those that want total separation from Jesuit and Catholic. By better understanding the population of those responsible for articulating mission both independently and in relationship to religiously unaffiliated employees, a methodology for engaging religiously unaffiliated employees can take shape.

Roles in Mission Formation and Those in These Roles

For most of the history of Jesuit education, a prevalent understanding of the responsibility of embodying mission fell to the substantial number of Jesuits in a variety of leadership positions on these campuses, especially Jesuits as presidents. As the demographic of presidents in Jesuit higher education has shifted to lay leadership, a new set of circumstances has led to the necessity of both lay people representing the Jesuit mission, as well as the creation of positions explicitly responsible for animating, promulgating, and deepening the mission in Jesuit institutions. At the onset of the 2023-2024 academic year, only four of the 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States have Jesuit presidents (Boston College, Creighton University, University of San

Francisco, and the University of Scranton).[206] The shift to lay presidents unfolded entirely within the 21st century. This transition led to Jesuit leadership as Mission Officers and Vice Presidencies, to ensure Jesuits in leadership still had the opportunity to influence and lead the charge of mission.

While the development of Vice Presidents for Mission & Identity or Mission Integration began primarily as roles for Jesuits, with the declining number of Jesuits available for leadership positions, these are now also being held by lay people as well. For some, the positions have been re-envisioned or re-named to mark a change in the responsibility of the position. For example, in 2022, Seattle University transitioned a Vice President for Mission and Ministry position to being a Vice President for Mission Integration. Seattle University hired Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos, who said of her role, "It's about having somebody at the level of higher leadership thinking about how the mission should be part of the important conversations taking place around strategic directions of the university."[207] In 2018, Loyola University Chicago hired its first Vice President for Mission Integration, creating an entire division focused on finding inroads for incorporating mission into the university. This position has been held by two women, Janet Sisler and current VP Claire Noonan. Canisius University named their first Vice President for Mission Integration in the summer of 2023, Sandy Estanek, who will be

[206] Information easily available on the websites of all Jesuit colleges and universities.
[207] Andru Zodrow, "Seattle University Creates New Vice Presidency Role for Mission Integration," *The Seattle Spectator*, April 27, 2022.

"responsible for articulating what it means to be a Catholic Jesuit IHE and for formation activities for the board, faculty, and staff."[208]

At the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year, 13 of the 27 schools had non-Jesuit Vice Presidents for Mission[209]. Notably, this includes seven (or slightly more than half of the non-Jesuit instances) women in leadership. This shift in gender leadership has been intentional in a variety of circumstances, especially within the Midwest Province. In fact, in their compilation of guiding documents for the province is an acknowledgment of the need for inclusion of women within the work. The document states, "The Midwest Province commits itself to striving for greater recognition, respect, inclusion and empowerment of the gifts of women in the life of our church and our Jesuit works."[210] While this comment falls under a larger umbrella of the need for development of lay leadership and collaboration with the Society of Jesus, the inclusion of women brings unique perspectives and gifts otherwise missing in some Catholic contexts.

The demographic shift within positions of leadership extends beyond presidents and vice presidents, and beyond Jesuit education. This shift from Jesuits to lay people, including women, also took place within leadership of Campus Ministry; Campus Ministry being primarily focused on student faith development and support on Jesuit campuses. Catholic health care has gone through similar changes, particularly given the

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[208] Sandy Estanek, "I have agreed…" LinkedIn Post, May 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/sandy-estanek-30778123_i-have-agreed-to-do-another-part-time-post-retirement-activity-7081622829808431104-SZQ2/.

[209] Stephanie Russell, "Chief Mission Officers AY 2023-2024 – Fall Roster." Email to author, August 22nd, 2023.

[210] "Go Forth! Ten Guiding Principles for the USA Midwest Jesuits," USA Midwest Province, Society of Jesus, created 2021, https://www.luc.edu/media/healthsciencesdivision/pdfs/UMI%20Planning%20Book%202019%20rev7.pdf. Pg.4.

decline in women's religious. Dr. Michael McCarthy, a medical school faculty member focused on bioethics, reported "As the number of women religious continued to decline, there was a need and interested in creating and maintaining positions focused on Catholic identity of these institutions…more recently through the role of mission leaders."[211] The creation of these new positions parallels the movement in higher education. In the same way that Catholic health care had to find ways to cultivate mission without the leadership of women's religious, Jesuit higher education is doing the same thing. With a growing understanding of the need for a wider population of employees to be more fluent and explicitly embody mission, positions have been and are being created for those desiring to serve faculty and staff. These positions often report to the Vice Presidents of Mission within their institutions. While most institutions now have these positions, they are still relatively new to Jesuit higher education and those in these roles are often responsible for creating new programs and resources. These positions focused on faculty and staff are often held by lay people, with only four Jesuits currently serving in this capacity in the United States (University of San Francisco, Le Moyne College, Loyola Maryland, and Holy Cross). The shift to lay collaborators being responsible for mission formation is notable and not unique to Jesuit education. The Marianists, another Catholic order and the sponsor of the University of Dayton, choose to be upfront about the shift to lay collaborators holding the responsibility for mission. On their university's website section about mission, it states,

> In the past 50 years, the number of Marianist brothers and priests in the U.S. has fallen from close to 1,400 to fewer than 350. The Forever Marianist Initiative

[211] Michael McCarthy, "A Voice in the Wilderness: Reimagining the Role of a Catholic Health Care Mission Leader," *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. 1 (2019): 117.

> ensures that the Marianist values central to UD's mission and identity will always live on as part of the UD experience.[212]

The Marianists have been working on this topic for years, engaging and empowering those outside the religious order with animating mission.

While there is an increasing level of women and lay individuals in leadership in mission in Jesuit higher education, the group of those serving as Mission Officers or in employee mission formation do not represent a wide range of diversity with regard to gender (only 1/3 of the Jesuit schools have women in leadership in mission, and no representation of those outside the gender binary system) and religious affiliation. Just over half of Mission Officers are Catholic priests, and at least six of the seven female Vice Presidents identify as Catholic.[213] Due to these statistics, there is a lack of diversity within those interviewed within the focus group experiences. The limitations that come with the homogeneity of this population are important to consider in the exploration of the responses and opinions of the group. However, the focus group and interviews did include diversity of gender, province, age, and tenure in Jesuit education. Of the eleven individuals with contributions to this research, five are men and six are women. Three of the four United States provinces are represented, with four folks from the Midwest, four from the East Coast, three from the West Coast. Of the 11, two work for their respective provinces, four are Vice Presidents of some iteration of Mission, Mission & Ministry, or Mission Integration, and five have Director positions focused on faculty/staff formation.

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[212] "Forever Marianist," University of Dayton website, Accessed December 6, 2022, https://udayton.edu/blogs/impact/2022/09--september/forever-marianist.php.

[213] This data set is based on the researcher's personal knowledge of the individuals in these positions as of September 2023.

The group organization was intentional, seeking as wide a perspective as possible, despite the religious and racial homogeny (all but one participant was white).

Focus Group: Those Currently in Mission Formation

Origin Stories

With the historical context of these positions established, the research focus now shifts to the particularities of the second focus group. This discussion gathered those individuals working in mission formation as a way of understanding contemporary Jesuit higher education, who these people are, and how this role intersects with the religiously unaffiliated population. This focus group began with a sharing of origin stories to this work. After hearing the backgrounds of these eleven individuals, three major themes emerged as significant to how people became committed and interested in leading the task of mission formation in their respective institutions. These themes include personal experience as students in Jesuit education at some level ranging from high school to doctoral studies; the simple and profound importance of invitation and relationships from those already in the work; and how distinct roles at Jesuit institutions led to a deepening of mission understanding to the point of transitioning from an original role to that of mission formator. Though a handful of miscellaneous instances also surfaced in the origin stories, the majority of interviewed individuals communicated something of these three themes.

The first evident theme among the origin stories is the importance of one's own experience of receiving a Jesuit education. Over half of this group were students in Jesuit institutions and named that as an influence on how they got to where they are today. One

way being a student rooted this group was through the community formed in these institutions and ways the values were shared to them. One focus group member commented, "Being a student at a Jesuit high school was formative for me as I was in the company of people who were capable of getting a group of adolescent boys to think deeply about who we are, what we are here for, and the possibility of God in our life."[214] Doing deep thinking and discernment is not the traditional narrative shared about high school boys. However, Jesuit education sets a standard for this kind of development and at least one focus group member benefitted from this approach. Another focus group member also resonated with the way the pedagogy and values were incorporated into an encounter of Jesuit education. She shared,

> I must have known [her college alma mater] was Catholic and Jesuit, but it did not factor in my decision for attending since I came from public school and was not Catholic. However, I found so much drew me in and resonated with me in the asking questions about meaning, purpose, and how to live a good life.[215]

The deep meaning making and discussions about ethics and morals led to her doing the RCIA program and seeking an additional degree from a Jesuit institution. Another group member spoke about how her Jesuit graduate school experience in theology and pastoral work gave language to the gifts she received in her Jesuit undergraduate life.

The theme of relationship begun in chapter three came up with this group as well. As one participant said, "I went into Jesuit education because I went to a Jesuit high school and was formed by the relationships I had with Jesuits who loved me into who I became. It's in my bones now."[216] The opportunity for a Jesuit education created the

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[214] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators in Jesuit Higher Education, July 25th, 2023.
[215] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[216] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.

space for relationships that would bring about support, encouragement, and an understanding about what Jesuit education is and its relevance at formative moments for many of the individuals now doing the work of mission formation. Given the rich capacity and fertile ground for faith development in traditionally aged high school and college aged students, it is unsurprising that a Jesuit education in these times would yield those committed not only to their faith, but to the work of inviting others into the richness of Jesuit education.

The theme of relationships goes beyond that of those who experienced Jesuit education as students. Multiple focus group participants described the importance of being invited to participate in mission-based programming, to apply for jobs, and to see themselves as already living the mission by people they respected and admired. One focus group member shared, "My story is rooted in the relationships of mentors that saw in me ministerial possibilities that nurtured me along. They invited me to participate in immersion trips, silent retreats, and other lay formation programs."[217] The mentors in her life went beyond general affirmation into actual invitation to participate in the mission of Jesuit education and to consider a vocational call to be a minister herself. Another person spoke of simply receiving actual mail with an application to apply for an Ignatian formation program and how she applied without doing research because she trusted this mentor in her life. Another spoke of a friend in the Catholic world inviting him to apply for a job at a Jesuit institution though he had no prior experience with the Jesuits. He said, "A friend reached out to ask if I'd be willing to be her boss and encouraged me to apply for a job at [a Jesuit university] even though I had never been affiliated with the

[217] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

Jesuits before."[218] That same person, hesitant that he would fit into the Jesuit ethos recalled the importance of budding relationships with those who would become his colleagues during his interview process. It was during the interview that "I shared my own philosophy to faith, relationship with others, and faith formation. A Jesuit in the room looked and me and said, 'Sounds pretty Ignatian to me!"[219] Old relationships of trust and experience influenced him as much as a very brief interaction with someone with innate "authority" of Jesuit mission demonstrating an affirmation of his gifts. Finally, the importance of relationships of depth and admiration resonated with those who wanted to try and understand how to imitate those they looked up to. A focus group member reflected,

> I found myself in relationships with friends and mentors that were very much in the Ignatian tradition that gave me space to ask things about discernment and reflection. This spoke so powerfully to me as a young person, to have people who engaged with me in this way that I admired.[220]

Relationships are at the heart of Ignatian spirituality and Jesuit mission, are imperative in the work of inviting others to mission formation (especially those who are religiously unaffiliated) and serve as the foundation for all those involved in this work.

Finally, a third emerging theme about origin stories is the inherent transiency of positions within higher education and how previous roles almost serve as "back doors" into entry of positions in mission formation. Because the roles focused on faculty and staff formation are relatively new, it is not a position people have previously intentionally sought with a general sense of education and experience that would qualify someone for

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[218] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[219] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[220] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

the role. Almost everyone doing this particular type of work had some other type of position within the university before shifting gears into a faculty and staff focused role. These roles included positions in Student Affairs, Campus Ministry, as a Faculty Member, fulfilling a grant-funded position, or involvement with the Catholic intellectual heritage. For example, one former academic has shifted into a Vice Presidency and she reflected, "While I've been in Jesuit higher education in multiple roles, it's really been more recently when I became the Vice President for Mission and Ministry that I really started deepening my understanding of Ignatian spirituality."[221] Despite having a solid understanding of Jesuit mission, it was in this role of Mission and Ministry that her own concept and origin story to understanding Ignatian spirituality became relevant and alive for her. The invitation to this work came to these individuals because of a demonstrated commitment and understanding of mission, as well as in an understanding of the inner workings of their respective institutions. As one woman commented about her recruitment into a faculty and staff facing position that had not previously existed, "I was recruited into the role as someone who had knowledge of the university community, but also academic and personal interests in these topics. It was a very natural evolution of the work I had been doing and relationships I had been building."[222] The content of the position – both the richness of the Ignatian tradition and the complex nature of the institution – were areas of expertise for her, thereby allowing her to seamlessly step into the role. This same transition happened for two other focus group members, both of which shifted from Campus Ministry positions into this work. Other members of the focus group root their origin stories in student affairs positions, both as faculty and as

[221] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[222] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

staff. One shared that she was invited to be a mission officer due to her ability to be a "jack of all trades. With a specialty in Catholic higher education, I sort of got brought through the back door and asked, can you be the one who articulates this vision?"[223] While the previous positions come from different areas of the university, the knowledge of the mission and the people they would be serving were both important in demonstrating an ability to do this work of employee formation.

Outside of these three themes, a handful of miscellaneous factors contributed to the origin stories of the focus group members. One shared that it was an invitation to consider his own faith more seriously that committed him to the mission of Jesuit education. He said,

> I like that image of the back door. Coming to [Jesuit institution] was the first moment I can remember realizing that there were very, very smart people who were quite accomplished intellectuals and scholars, but also people of faith. Then once at the institution, I got involved in retreats, immersion trips, liturgies, and so forth. This led me to be more interested in my Presbyterian faith on top of the mission itself.[224]

Other connection points included the richness of the Catholic intellectual heritage and the way her institution's center for this topic engaged in meaning making dialogues. Another member spoke of the historic connection of being a student at the time of murder of the Jesuit martyrs in El Salvador in 1989.

He said:

> I remember being pulled together, being told what happened, and giving context for El Salvador made me feel like I was part of something much bigger than myself, part of a tradition. That this tradition came with a set of commitments, and those commitments were lived and witnessed to, and in this instance even

[223] Participant F, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[224] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

> died for, by people who really cared deeply about the possibility of God and God's love in the world.[225]

Given the ongoing influence of the witness and inspiration of the Salvadoran martyrs and their housekeeper and daughter, being a student at that historic moment deepened an already growing commitment to Jesuit mission for this individual. It is worth noting that one female mission officer indicated that her origin story to mission commitment did not happen when she was a student in Jesuit education. She struggled with some interactions with Jesuits and found that many people "romanticized St. Ignatius and the Jesuits. I was working daily with Jesuits that regularly did not live up to these ideals, making it difficult for me to want to participate."[226] Though the mission became compelling to her in different roles, her initial origin story was one of complexity and resistance due to difficult relationships, relationships continuing to be key in how mission is communicated and promulgated among individuals that are not Jesuits themselves. These origin stories are diverse and rich, demonstrating some consistent themes. The wisdom of how those responsible for mission development their commitment for this work can be used as a model for how to invite others into this mission, to whatever extent is most authentic to who they are and in the roles they hold.

Purpose of the Positions

The relationships and experiences of those committed to doing the work of mission formation contribute to the why someone would choose to be a mission officer, Vice President for Mission, or position focused on the formation of employees. With these roles being relatively new as compared to other university positions, the

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[225] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[226] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

personalities and abilities of those in the role are defining what these positions are about and laying groundwork for future individuals in these positions. Understanding the purpose of these positions will enable an exploration of how the positions will support their respective colleagues who are religiously unaffiliated. There are significant parallels about how the focus group members perceived their roles with the ways the focus group of religiously unaffiliated employees described the ways they felt included in the animation of mission. Those themes include the primacy of relationships, the creation of space for formation and meaning making, and the facilitation of intentional programs of inclusion and relevance. The consistency of these themes among the mission formation staff and administrators speak to a common goal and ethos for how this work can be done in Jesuit higher education moving forward.

The first of these themes is unsurprisingly how important relationship-building and relationships of care and trust are to the work of communicating and transmitting the mission of an institution. In the book, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, authors William Barry and William Connelly describe the kind of person that is best suited to be a spiritual director. Their description mirrors the qualities of someone best suited to roles in mission formation. They write:

> The best candidates are those who have lived life and not been afraid of its joys and pains. They have been able to develop close relationships with other people…the people who are most comfortable in this role are generally active, vibrant, earthy, and intelligent, a far cry from the usual stereotype of the 'spiritual' person. They are as real as rain, fog, and sunshine.[227]

[227] William Barry, S.J. and William Connelly S.J., *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (United States: HarperOne, 2009), 37-38.

The various descriptors help describe the type of person who will be available for conversations of depth, honesty, and vulnerability. As one focus group member described his role, he shared, "I listen to people's stories and encourage them to share their stories with others."[228] Other focus group members visibly responded to the description of being one who listens as part of this role. Another element of relationship building is that of being trustworthy and trusting others. A participant shared, "Part of our work is trusting that the mission is being lived in a wide range of ways and that those ways are good. I trust people. I try to be someone others can trust."[229] With a foundation of trust and knowing one will be heard, this leads to being a conduit for facing the pain and disaffiliation people have with institutions, particularly the Catholic Church. One focus group member shared, "An enormous part of my work is establishing or reestablishing trust, not just with the church, but with universities, government, democracy, you name it. There is just more and more distrust in our culture."[230] The ability to enter into the possibility of developing or redeveloping trust in institutions that have been disappointing, unethical, or harmful necessitates dialogue partners that represent the best of what these institutions can be without glossing over the concerns an individual has.

With trust and support established, the next phase of relationship building involves honoring the gifts of the other, providing space for people to discuss and integrate topics of mission in authentic ways, and inviting the other to see themselves as mission animators. Almost every participant used the word invite or invitation at some point in the focus group. The idea of invitation began in the group with a focus on

[228] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[229] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[230] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

inviting others to spaces of openness and possibility of mission connection. A participant named one component of his work is "trying to create an appealing environment of invitation to people where they can accept the invitation, grow, and learn, or leave it alone and not feel coerced. I try to be very open, very inclusive, and inviting."[231] The work begins with creating space for the invitation to be heard and received. A Vice President participant defined the purpose of this work by saying, "We need to be people for and with others and our charge is to then invite our colleagues into that so they can encounter it and explore it and claim it."[232] The invitation goes beyond considering how the mission is lived at the university to include how mission contributed to their own lives and understand what it is like to receive the gifts and benefits of mission affiliation. One woman shared, "The real beating heart of the work is the opportunity to engage with individuals in their whole personhood and invite them to consider what they find enriching or exciting or consoling or inspiring."[233] The only Jesuit member of the focus group shared that the work of mission formation is that of inviting everyone to "a different understanding of the purpose of education, how education is done, why education is done, and how to engage the human person in education. Because a university is a university, not a church."[234] When a relationship is established in a way that demonstrates trust, respect for one's gifts and abilities, and a sincere desire to support the person with all of their identities and experiences, the invitation to something deeper and meaningful is more easily received and accessed.

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[231] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[232] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[233] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[234] Participant H, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

With a consistent ethic of invitation, staff, faculty, and administrators can choose to say yes to any number of opportunities to continue their own formation within their roles and lives. The phrase formation is used in specific ways in Jesuit education. While it has formal connotations affiliated with the development of men becoming Jesuits, in Jesuit higher education, it is mean to describe an on-going deepening of understanding and greater invitation for one to integrate professional responsibilities, personal values, values of the Society of Jesus, and one's individual determination of who and how they want to be in the world. This is at the heart of what participants describe as the work of mission, and also the gifts of the work itself for those in the midst of it. For example, one member of the focus group shared, "One of the most rewarding aspects of the work is to sit with colleagues, learn what is important to them, what they are working on, and accompany them on that journey and thinking about how the tools and resources of the mission might be useful to them."[235] The combination of being in a privileged space of witnessing what matters to a colleague, but also then being able to share the gifts of Jesuit education is a place of grace and gift for the one facilitating the formation. Another member of the focus group described the importance of the intentionality of the phrase "way of proceeding," a term commonplace in Ignatian circles. She said,

> We create space to make known and relevant the gifts of the Jesuit educational tradition for life and for work. I want to embody the mission and way of proceeding and invite faculty and staff to understand their own ways of proceeding more than necessarily delivering specific content.[236]

A way of proceeding implies thought was put into the ensuing action or strategy unfolding, a nod to the "contemplatives in action" defined in chapter two. Bringing

[235] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[236] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

intentionality into decision making is deeply Ignatian and deeply inclusive across religious affiliation or disaffiliation.

Finally, the conversation about formation shifted to the development of leaders and animators of the mission. One man named, "It's our job not just to tell the Ignatian story or teach them language but to create leaders in mission. This means we need our colleagues to figure out how they will adopt, animate, appropriate the mission for themselves."[237] This approach connects back to the phrase, *cura personalis* or care of the whole unique person. One element of this work is helping a colleague make the mission theirs, but also trusting that their animation of the mission, while different from others, is still valuable and enriching to the entire university community. The hope of this formation is that it would not remain simply a gift to the initial colleague receiving the space, but percolate within the rest of the school. A participant shared, "We hope to move folks to the point where they can embody the mission in their whole being, their whole person, and eventually be able to empower others to do that as well."[238] The work continues to spread throughout the community as the number of individuals seeing themselves as owners of the mission grows. As one Vice President named, "We have a pretty good-sized mission division with about 30 employees. But our campus has 10,000 people, so we need leaders and advocates and others saturated in the Ignatian charism inviting others in."[239] There is always more work to be done, and more opportunity to deepen the school's lived expression of mission. Everyone is needed in this work.

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[237] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[238] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[239] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

Other fields have also been wrestling with how to get everyone involved in the work of mission in their respective areas. There is additional wisdom about the purpose of mission officers coming out of other fields, particularly Catholic health care, as well as in other Catholic institutions of higher education that are not Jesuit. Dr. McCarthy speaks to the need for mission officers to be well-versed in theology, not just be individuals with leadership experience that shift into a mission role. He wrote,

> Catholic health care benefits from the ability of mission leaders educated in theology, ethics, and spirituality, to speak to the theological foundations of Catholic health care and the social inequalities present in it and can work collaboratively to address complex challenges in a way that reflects the mission of Catholic health care ministries in a broken world.[240]

Positions that are meant to help others connect to mission need both the interpersonal skills discussed in the focus group, and an expertise in the mission itself. This expertise should go beyond an entry level understanding of the theology behind the mission, as well as the lived expression in one's respective context. At the University of Dayton, a Marianist university, the office of Mission and Rector has a straightforward need for knowledge as it is "to form people and communities committed to our Catholic and Marianist tradition of education."[241] This position has programmatic responsibilities tackled later in this chapter but begins with a theological and educational understanding that roots the mission itself. The need for expertise is imperative to transmitting the mission in its authenticity.

Finally, the third theme that emerged from the purpose of mission formation is the need for physical programs that create space for relationships to develop, for invitations

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[240] McCarthy, "A Voice in the Wilderness," 128-9.
[241] "Office for Mission and Rector," University of Dayton website, Accessed October 10, 2023, https://udayton.edu/rector/index.php.

to be heard, and for formation to occur. As the Provincial Assistant for Higher Education Michael Tunney, S.J., shared, "We need formation programs that invite and make them dig a little deeper into what all these parts of mission mean and what more they can mean."[242] The programs need to cover a wide spectrum of topics, approaches, and desired outcomes with the hope of connecting to a diverse population in a college or university. Those in roles of mission formation understand the necessity of these programs, naming the importance of communicating the tradition, demonstrating the pedagogy, translating things into a particular context, and helping build meaningful communities. For one participant, the programs "are where we can do some of the transmission of information about mission and give language to the pedagogy we hope people are experiencing in their general experience of the school."[243] Part of this transmission is dependent on those in mission formation being deeply immersed within the tradition itself. On one hand, this involves some level of fluency with the Jesuit and Catholic foundations of the educational mission. One participant shared,

> I think my primary job is to be someone who both has a good grasp of the tradition, which isn't as easily achieved as some might think, and has the ability to do the translation, to speak to a lay audience about this tradition in a way that would be accessible, inspiring, and something that can shape another's work.[244]

Those in these roles have to hold both the role of expert, as well as educational practitioner. As educators, those in these roles understand the importance of making content relevant to their audience. As one focus group member shared, "I try to craft structures and programs that help people meet the need of the moment of the university.

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[242] Tunney, S.J., Interview.
[243] Participant I, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[244] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

Every single program is refreshed constantly."[245] There was consensus among the group that one of the major gifts of Jesuit education is the ongoing relevance it has to the needs and situations of the world at any point in its history.

Communicating the mission in these terms enables more meaningful and committed connections. Finally, the gift of mission formation is the opportunity to build authentic community that in some ways removes a touch of pressure with working together. One participant named, "We provide offerings that try to help people come together and talk to each other across disciplines, across boundaries, and across silos. We build community not only to know each other, but to connect to something larger."[246] The need for community continues to grow given societal norms of isolation, working from home modalities, and not having tangible reasons to be together. Another participant shared anecdotes of different connections that formed due to mission programming, including added support for veteran students, the creation of a reading group, and even "a group of folks who now play Dungeons and Dragons together monthly. I don't understand it, but they are thrilled!"[247] Relationships and community are spaces where mission can deepen and a commitment to the heritage and values of Jesuit schools can thrive, knowing others are working toward similar goals and also that they themselves are part of this work.

Again, exploring the programmatic nature of those in mission work has parallel and connection to the work of other Catholic colleges and universities, as well as in Catholic health care. For example, at the University of Dayton, there is a program called

[245] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[246] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[247] Participant I, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

the Marianist Educational Associates, which is a "formation program filled with readings, reflections, and a sharing of insights. Formation begins with a retreat…monthly meetings…to continue their formation by developing, strengthening, and advancing our Catholic and Marianist philosophy of education."[248] This program engages both the spiritual and the intellectual sides of the Marianist mission. Barry University, a Dominican school, has spent the last decade finding ways to programmatically and structurally institutionalize how the school engages with mission. Their approach includes similarities to Jesuit education, in the desire to include more lay leaders, and in creating divisions or departments focused on mission formation and transmission. One of their programmatic components is the need for storytelling. In an article about mission formation, Scott Smith and Roxanne Davies include the importance of "the transmission of values and culture from an institution's religious sponsors to the institution itself fostered by the retelling of foundational stories."[249] Telling the stories of the founding order, as well as the institution itself is helpful in inviting others to the mission and the rich history of the school as well.

Catholic health care is also doing its own programmatic work in mission formation. Ascension is a Catholic health care network that exists in 19 states and defines their mission as,

> Rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer, we commit ourselves to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable. Our Catholic health care ministry is dedicated to spiritually centered, holistic care

[248] "Marianist Educational Associates," University of Dayton website, Accessed October 10, 2023, https://udayton.edu/rector/fac-staff-formation-opportunities/marianist_educational_associates.php.
[249] Scott Smith and Roxanne Davies, "Institutionalizing Mission Engagement and Leadership Formation at a Dominican University," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 35, no. 1 (2016): 49.

> which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities. We are advocates for a compassion and just society through our actions and words.[250]

This mission is not just something that exists on a website used for external communications, but a guide to a variety of program-based formation opportunities for employees at a variety of levels. This includes a two-year cohort model to train executives "with a deep understanding of the theological foundations and resources that sustain Catholic healthcare."[251] It includes one-year programs for those in mid-level management. The Healthcare Ethics department focuses on programs and resources that work with anyone in the network. These programmatic approaches contribute to the transmission of an organization's mission within complex and diverse systems.

In conclusion, the role of those in Mission Formation is emerging, complex, and currently staffed by those that have been invited, inspired, and empowered to serve in their respective roles. Whether the individual is a Vice President for Mission Integration or Mission and Ministry, a formal mission officer, or in a range of titles of those doing formation with faculty and staff, each of these individuals comes to the work with their own origin stories, influences, and language to describe their actual work.

A final insight into these roles is the degree to which those in mission formation need to be scholar-practitioners, both experts in content and pedagogy. The role asks one to wear a variety of hats, able to educate for large and small groups, provide pastoral support, demonstrate fluency in Jesuit and Ignatian topics, navigate the complexity of a university system, and so on. Scholar-administrator Patrick Green writes about the

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[250] "Our Mission," Ascension Catholic Health Care Website, Accessed October 10, 2023, https://about.ascension.org/our-mission.
[251] *Ascension,* "Our Mission."

complexity of roles in his 2023 article, "The Scholar-Administrator Imperative." He uses the term "third-space professional" to describe the work of people who are in roles that are challenging to define and bridge a chasm that naturally happens between staff and faculty in higher education. He wrote, "The scholar-administrator is framed as a hybrid or multidimensional professional role, bearing several responsibilities and roles."[252] The position descriptions began with a description of who makes the best spiritual director, and the description also defines ideal qualities for those in mission roles. Beyond the interpersonal skills, the knowledge of both content as well as how to effectively educate others is necessary in this role. The character and personality of the individuals that fill these roles contribute to their ability to successfully invite as many others as possible into the work of mission. The origin stories and descriptions of the role are foundational to an exploration as to how this group, as predominantly Catholic and Christian, invites and empowers religiously unaffiliated colleagues.

Who are our Religiously Unaffiliated Employees? Perceptions and Feelings

After sharing their respective stories and contexts, the focus group of those in mission formation turned their attention to their colleagues that are religiously unaffiliated. While the previous chapter contained a discussion of the stereotypes and perceptions religiously unaffiliated individuals experience, this chapter directly asks mission officers about their perceptions of this population at Jesuit institutions. This will include actual feelings and perceptions that the mission formation folks individually hold, a celebration of the gifts these individuals feel religiously unaffiliated colleagues bring to

[252] Patrick Green, "The Scholar-Administrator: Developing Scholarship and Research through Practice to Build the Community Engagement Field," *Metropolitan Universities* 34, no. 3 (July 2023): 95.

the mission, and an acknowledgment of the obstacles their colleagues face in connecting to mission. The exploration of these topics hopefully creates a space to honor their respective colleagues, as well as contribute to a more intentional strategy for better supporting and inviting in religiously unaffiliated employees to mission in Jesuit colleges and universities.

The focus group participants each had the opportunity to speak about their feelings, perceptions, and approaches to working with religiously unaffiliated colleagues. The first theme that emerged was that to a degree, those in mission work only know the religious identity of a colleague if the person has provided the information. Consistent with the inability to find statistics about employee religious identity, the ability to know one's religious identity is entirely voluntary. Multiple members of the group named this reality, including one participant who said, "I struggled to prepare for this conversation because we don't ask. I simply don't know who is or isn't religiously affiliated."[253] It is common for a group simply not to know, and a number of folks named the danger in making assumptions that people are either religious or religiously unaffiliated. However, the not knowing did not prevent the work of mission formation from happening. One Vice President shared, "I don't think your religious affiliation or non-affiliation has anything to do with understanding the mission, living the mission, and being in the mission."[254] The lack of knowing is not about not caring, but rather an understanding that religious identity does not prevent one from being invited into the work of mission. One participant shared a parallel of this question to a 2023 episode of the Apple+ television

[253] Participant F, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[254] Participant H, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

show, Ted Lasso. The person pulled up a quote from an episode when a men's soccer team discovers one of their teammates is gay. While initially the team expressed sentiments that it didn't matter and they don't care, the coach challenged this language saying, "We don't not care. We care very much. We care about who you are and what you must've been going through. But hey, from now on, you don't have to go through it all by yourself."[255] This sentiment reflects the on-going care those in mission formation hope to communicate to their colleagues. Finally, one individual said, "I don't think about my work as any different when working with colleagues who are religious or not. I hope to make things as inclusive as possible for everyone because everyone can engage with our values of reflection, discernment, justice, and so on."[256] The goal from these individuals is inclusion and complete lack of judgment.

With regard to the felt sense of this topic, a range of emotions emerged. For one person, there was a sense of apprehension about the possibility of causing harm and of being misunderstood. He shared, "I feel like I have to be very finely attuned as a translator. Missteps are so readily found with an audience where I may not have common ground or a shared context." Others felt differently about this topic. One woman shared, "There's something really energizing to me about engaging folks who self-identify in these categories because they still chose to be here. It's a gift to hear why that is!"[257] A third emotion represented was admiration. Another participant named the "real love and respect I have for my colleagues who are religiously unaffiliated and how powerful it is

[255] *Ted Lasso, s*eason 3, episode 9, "La Locker Room Aux Folles," directed by Erica Dunton, aired May 10, 2023, on Apple TV+.
[256] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[257] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

to see the ways they accept and understand the mission."[258] The various feelings the focus group unearthed came from places of honesty, desire to serve, and gratitude for their colleagues.

It is important to name that there were also some comments that indicated frustration or challenge with folks who are religiously unaffiliated. For example, one person shared, "It's the fallen aways who are some of the most challenging to engage with mission, and the truly religious nones, ignorant of any faith, can be challenging but in a different way. In any case, this is a great opportunity to think about how to meet them."[259] This quote indicates a level of frustration with individuals without a religious tradition, while also seemingly making the claim that those who identify as religious ones are seen as ignorant. Further, another person shared,

> I don't think that in attending to [religiously unaffiliated employees], we are doing much for the mission of the university in terms of its long-term maintenance. I think we have an obligation to engage because we are called to share our tradition and its insights, but I think we spend an inordinate amount of time attending to people who are uninterested in the mission.[260]

The last two comments by those who participated in this research demonstrate there is a spectrum of perception about this community and what the purpose and approach of mission formation could be in this context. Aware that one's perception impacts the way a person interacts with someone, it is possible to see how those who are religiously unaffiliated could feel misunderstood or dismissed by mission formators.

Beyond the spectrum of feelings, the participants were able to name qualities they have experienced and believe to be true about their colleagues. For one man, "When I

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[258] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[259] Participant J, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[260] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

hear religiously unaffiliated, I think of people who still have deep spirituality and purpose, but just do not name it in the context of an organized religion."[261] The context of the individual matters, and a religious affiliation is not required to practice a life of spirit, soul, and intentionality. Finally, one woman shared that her religiously unaffiliated colleagues "have so much to teach those who are Catholic. A sense of familiarity blinds us to both the positive and negative. Having a fresh perspective from an outsider's perspective, not in a sense of inclusion or exclusion, just observational, provides so much insight."[262] Approaching this community as individuals and a collective of those with gifts to offer, insight to be shared, and those to be celebrated for who they are deeply impacts the way that this community will receive formation and feel included in the work.

Finally, several participants spoke about their approaches to working with employees that are religiously unaffiliated. Multiple individuals spoke to the importance of a meaningful engagement of the core values of Jesuit education, as seen as universal to humanity rather than explicitly Catholic or religious. One focus group member shared, "I hope to engage my colleagues around our rich values and give people the freedom and space to talk about that from whatever perspective they are coming from."[263] The values themselves contribute to a sense of invitation, as there is no religious requirement to consider caring more meaningfully for others, thinking about being a person for others, or recognizing the gift of reflection and discernment. The inclusion of giving people freedom and space to engage with these values also matters, as this is truly discernment

[261] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[262] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[263] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

pedagogically speaking. Once the spaces are created, the universality of the values can be shared and considered. One person explained the necessity of story-sharing. He commented,

> By simply being as broadly inclusive as possible in the stories that people share about the mission, people who are not affiliated find a home here. Not because we've created a space for the agnostics or humanists, but because we've created spaces where all truly are welcome.[264]

Representation matters.[265] Inclusivity matters.[266] Belonging matters.[267] Hearing the ways people appropriate mission in contexts that parallel one's experience enables someone to feel seen, included, and part of something larger than themselves. This inclusivity and belonging impact everyone involved, not simply those who are religiously unaffiliated. As one woman shared, "Our communities are so enriched by the diversity of perspectives. It sounds cliché, but everyone benefits when we have a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences that folks are willing to share with one another."[268] The diversity of sharing broadens what living mission can mean and continues to enrich the lived expression of mission within an institution. Finally, a Jesuit spoke to his approach

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[264] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[265] "The experiences that we all want to have as human beings are to feel understood, be seen and be valued for our input, effort and contribution to achieving results. Even being included won't provide that experience if when we are included, we are ignored or not taken seriously. It's more important that we feel represented than include. We want to know that we are truly heard." Mark Samuel, "Why Representation Is More Important Than Inclusion Alone," *Forbes*, December 13, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2021/12/13/why-representation-is-more-important-than-inclusion-alone/?sh=813078a66c48.
[266] "Employees in organizations with higher (versus lower) scores on our inclusion assessment are 45 percent more likely to stay at their organization and 90 percent more likely to go out of their way to help a colleague." Diana Ellsworth, Drew Goldstein, and Bill Schaninger, "Inclusion doesn't happen by accident: Measuring inclusion in a way that matters," *McKinsey and Company*, February 16, 2021, https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/the-organization-blog/inclusion-doesnt-happen-by-accident-measuring-inclusion-in-a-way-that-matters.
[267] "Empirical research points to the benefits of belonging, including…motivation, success, and persistence." Annemarie Vaccaro and Barbara Newman, "Theoretical Foundations for Sense of Belonging in College," *The Impact of a Sense of Belonging in College,* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 2022), 3.
[268] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

of working with this population. His comments demonstrated the ability to remain meaningfully rooted in his own identity while including those who are different from him. He said,

> I am never going to be ashamed to tell people I love Jesus, that I do what I do for Jesus. And Jesus is the center of my life and the impetus of all I do. But we're professional educators, and I need to be able to explain to people who don't love Jesus, or who understand Jesus differently than I do, or understand God differently than I do, or have no belief in God. I need to be able to ask them, knowing there are answers, why can you fit here? How can you help us do our mission? How can this mission be your mission? While this stems from my faith, it stems from my love of this Jesus, I believe the mission is a universal mission because Jesus's mission was a universal mission. Everyone belongs in this.[269]

The approach that all belong and have something to contribute requires a considerable amount of freedom, sometimes for those who want things to be more explicitly Catholic or see the foundation of faith to be necessary for someone to embody what the mission is. That said, there are implications for a lack of freedom, including excluding those willing to contribute and missing out on the gifts being offered by others. Taking the approach of many of the focus group participants in celebrating individual contributions to mission and supporting those who are religiously unaffiliated creates a more inclusive environment overall.

Contributions of Religiously Unaffiliated Colleagues to Mission

Rather than simply giving generic affirmations to an entire demographic of people, the focus group had the opportunity to specifically name some of the gifts that their religiously unaffiliated colleagues brought to their institution's expression of mission. To begin, simply by accepting a position working in Jesuit higher education, the individuals are making a contribution to mission. One of the Vice Presidents simply

[269] Participant H, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

stated, "The greatest contribution is doing what we ask them to do. That fulfills the mission."[270] However, beyond that, this population does a great deal more. Among these gifts include a deep and lived commitment to the common good, helping create and sustain academic excellence, and bringing diverse perspectives and opinions to conversations of mission as it continues to emerge in its own unique way at each school.

The first of these gifts is the ability to connect in meaningful ways to social justice. Multiple focus group members commented on lived expressions of working toward both racial and environmental justice while other members nodded and affirmed these stories. Almost every focus group member was able to name a colleague that was meaningfully contributing to justice throughout their institutions. One person named that because her colleague's entry point to Jesuit education is social justice, they have natural overlap together. She shared, "He believes so strongly in racial justice and regularly asks our office how to do this intentionally in a Jesuit way."[271] He recognizes that the work of racial justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are not separate from the mission, but deeply entrenched within it. A Vice President shared her admiration for those working in student life, namely residence life, advisors, health professionals, who embed their job descriptions into a larger understanding of social justice. She said,

> We have great colleagues in student life that are committed to caring for the whole person with our students in deeply meaningful ways. They wouldn't say they are religious. I am in awe of how they build community in such ways that promote justice and belonging.[272]

[270] Participant H, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[271] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[272] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

There is an end goal to the work they are doing, not simply a transactional approach to the ways they interact with students. Others talked about colleagues committed to composting, inviting recycling efforts, and generally enriching the campuses commitment to environmental sustainability. Finally, one woman shared about a general campus culture on her campus, saying, "Regardless of faith tradition, my colleagues across the board are committed to the social justice part of our mission. They wouldn't be here otherwise. In fact, it would be difficult to actually fit in here if one didn't demonstrate this commitment."[273] This shared understanding of mission and a more global desire for social justice creates an immeasurable amount of opportunity for folks to participate in Jesuit educational mission.

Another way religiously unaffiliated individuals contribute to mission is through their impact on academic excellence. As one focus group member began, "In so far as teaching and research are primary activities of a university, obviously one need not be religious in any way to do that well and contribute in meaningful ways."[274] Faculty members are hired specifically for their scholarship and teaching, both of which deeply demonstrate an arm of mission. One focus group member, connected to one of the most academically prestigious Jesuit schools, shared, "To look at contributions, just look to academic excellence. We have access to so much talent and it is a huge gift that this is a place that they want to work. The reason we exist as a university is for the academics."[275] Another focus group member spoke of a particular faculty member who works in the Department of Fine Arts and identifies as atheist. His religious identity did not prevent

[273] Participant I, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[274] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[275] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

him from inviting a mission officer to be part of his work. The mission officer said, "He asked me to be on their advisory committee because he loves expressing mission and he wants it to inform the academic coursework of his students."[276] Each member of the focus group was able to name that faculty as a whole are dedicated to academic excellence and scholarship, and also to name individual faculty that have done something beyond connection to academic excellence that demonstrates mission meaningfully. Finally, a focus group member talked about what living mission in connection to academic excellence looks like. He said,

> If you come here, I want you to be a great physicist. I want you to be a world-class historian. I want you to be an amazing nurse. But while you're here, I want you to wrestle with how those things are helping you be a better partner or a better lover, or a better spouse, or a better parent. I want you to become more vulnerable so that you have the capacity to love and be loved because this is what is under it all.[277]

As stated before, academics is the primary function of a university or college, so all contributions to it are missional.

Finally, the third theme that emerged from the focus group in defining contributions of religiously unaffiliated employees to mission was that of diversity and perspective. Again, almost every person affiliated with the focus groups shared the gift it is to have someone not positioned deep within a tradition provide insight into the tradition itself. On one hand, it invites those responsible for mission formation to recognize the work is never done or established. One focus group member shared, "Our unaffiliated faculty – through their asking questions presence – requires us to look critically at our tradition. That's a huge gift. They invite us to articulate and frame

[276] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[277] Participant H, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

something that is necessary that helps our tradition not be stagnant."[278] In times of busyness and navigating a multitude of priorities or constituencies, mission work, like other areas of the university, can fall into the trap of doing things the way they have always been done without exploring better ways of proceeding or identifying approaches that have become problematic for any number of reasons. Religiously unaffiliated individuals can help mission formation staff "recognize blind spots for those of us immersed in the tradition."[279] In inviting a deeper awareness about the tradition itself, those outside the tradition help identify stumbling blocks for others, as well as new insights or ideas for the tradition itself. As one woman said,

> Our communities are so enriched by the diversity of perspectives. It takes external eyes and external voices to help us both discern what is good and helpful and worthwhile *and* rediscover some of the exciting and energizing things we are sort of dulled to being in it all the time.[280]

The gifts range from providing a reason for on-going development and nuance for the mission to actually giving those with the most experience in understanding and articulating mission to learn something new as well. Ultimately though, one person named that talking about diversity can be seen as cliché, despite the gifts of diversity work being genuinely true. There is a deepness and expansiveness to having different perspectives included in the culture of a community. This participant said,

> The university is richer by having a breadth of voices at the table. The more broadly we can have a conversation with a different variety of perspectives, whether that's racial, cultural, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious or religiously unaffiliated, the richer the conversation becomes.[281]

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[278] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[279] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[280] Participant B, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[281] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

Without the voices of the religiously unaffiliated employees contributing to mission, the blind spots would remain unseen, insights would remain hidden, and possible issues and challenges might not be articulated. It is through these issues and challenges that additional insight into the population of religiously unaffiliated employees arise.

Stumbling Blocks to Mission for Religiously Unaffiliated Colleagues

As one engages with the Examen, there is an importance in naming both the gifts and graces as much as the challenges and frustrations. In the same manner, this research mirrors the Examen by first beginning with the gifts and graces seen within the religiously unaffiliated population. Both the Examen and this research then move to the challenges, obstacles, and places that were incongruent with one's values. In some ways, it is even more impressive to consider the mission contributions when considering the hurdles and stumbling blocks that must be overcome for folks without a religious tradition. One element of this is the problematic ways that Christianity, religion, and Catholicism specifically are defined and talked about in general society. On a large level, the portrayals of the Catholic Church by media span a wide range of accuracy and often lack an understanding of the complexity and big tent element of the Church. As one focus group member said,

> Most of the faculty's information about Catholicism comes from the New York Times. I'm a huge fan of the NYT. I read it every day, but even I am aghast sometimes by what they write. If that is your only source about Catholicism, then you see it as dangerous, as rigid, as polarized, as something you don't want to be affiliated with. If you only use that source, the Catholic part of Jesuit mission is a huge stumbling block for religiously unaffiliated faculty.[282]

[282] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

Several members of the focus group echoed this perspective, that incomplete information about Catholicism generally prevented some of their colleagues from being able to fully embrace what the mission of their institutions is. One even commented, "The lack of understanding with where kinship, solidarity, and justice fit into a Catholic ethos is discouraging."[283] Sometimes this occurs because those responsible do not find effective ways of communicating these truths, while sometimes this happens because one is unwilling to learn this background. As one person said, "Sometimes how we present the mission can be narrow, boring, or lazy. The pedagogy of sharing mission is imperative for others to have the desire to know more."[284] These misunderstandings are part of the culture from which the employees come from and the starting point for many. The God language can be problematic for some, and when the mission is presented only in these terms, and done without intentionality, it can contribute to a lack of interest or desire to participate, possibly making religiously unaffiliated colleagues feel like they are welcome. All of this said, while it is the responsibility of the institution and its mission formation team to broaden an understanding of Catholicism, the lived reality of this community in connection to the Catholic Church creates obstacles of its own.

Every person interviewed for this focus group contributed to the honest narrative of the ways the Catholic Church has caused harm to others. The harm comes in many forms, with some of those specifics being raised in the conversation. This concern is well known and rooted in actual problematic behaviors of the Catholic Church. As Tunney expressed, "Though it may not show up initially, when you actually explore this, it is

[283] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[284] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

because of their miserable or difficult experience with the Church. Some of these folks were people of faith that had to walk away because of this pain."[285] Though his comment speaks to a broader concern, a focus group member put a sharper slant to the topic. She said,

> Do you blame them? If you are a woman? If you are part of the LGBTQ+ community? If you are related to someone who has abuse in their past or know someone who was abused by a priest? If you are concerned by a lack of action about issues of injustice in the world like racism, the environment, women's rights, and so forth?[286]

There are justifiable reasons to have concern about a Catholic identity. Some are able to hold support and frustration together. Another participant named,

> Catholic Social Teaching and the Catholic intellectual tradition are great demonstrations of our catholicity. People get on board with kinship, social justice, racial justice. The places where our staff bump against the Catholic piece is around LGBTQ+ issue and abortion.[287]

These frustrations are not limited to folks that are religiously unaffiliated. Two individuals shared that they would not be willing to do this mission formation work in a number of Catholic communities because those locations or orders do not readily acknowledge this pain. So even those committed to the faith, with careers immersed in this world, are impacted by this tension and the sins of the Church. There was a sense of solidarity and compassion among many in the focus group with this dilemma. As one person said, "A major barrier to mission is the church's exclusivity and the deep wounded experiences of the church, mostly related to identities they may hold. I completely understand it."[288] These issues get in the way of connecting to mission for a

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[285] Tunney, S.J., Interview.
[286] Participant I, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[287] Participant D, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[288] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

wide group of folks, but particularly religiously unaffiliated individuals. It also contributes to the tension and debate about how to use the language of Jesuit and Catholic when defining and describing the mission itself.

The Tension of Holding Jesuit and Catholic

Focus Group Members: Holding this Tension

While there is a great deal to say about the tension that exists with holding a mission that is Catholic and Jesuit, a starting point is the pressure this tension puts on those responsible for mission formation in their institutions. As one person shared,

> There is an undeniable tension in the job of being a mission leader because we get criticized by all sides. We are too institutional or not institutional enough, too Catholic or not Catholic enough, all while we are trying to walk a line that honors people and honors a tradition.[289]

The person is asked to represent the institution, the Church, the Society of Jesus, all while holding the tension for themselves at the same time. Because of the intensity of the feelings around this topic, the emotional labor involved in navigating those conversations can be exhausting. One person commented that her willingness to share some of her concerns about the Catholic Church while in her mission formation role opened up greater conversation with her colleagues that were religiously unaffiliated. Often, these employees feel the explicit and implicit expectation of others to respond to the critique coming from every angle. One of the Vice Presidents named,

> I always start conversations about this with trepidation because every conversation where it is difficult is somebody coming in with a stance. Either I don't say Catholic enough or I say Catholic too much. Both conversation partners

[289] Participant G, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

> can project on me. I try to help people come to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of all of this.[290]

Almost everyone interviewed named the complexity of this tension and how they feel responsible for navigating that fine line for many constituencies in their colleges and universities. In speaking with Rita Dollard-O'Malley, who has spent her entire career in Jesuit education named that "we say Jesuit, but we whisper Catholic. That was in part because people before me and my generation didn't want to say it too loud because it might alienate and we were working really hard on inclusion, inclusion, inclusion."[291] There appears to be something more inclusive and inviting with the Jesuit terminology, while the Catholic language feels problematic.

One Vice president described the situation as "a bifurcation, such that everything we don't like about the [Catholic] Church is in the basket of the Church. Everything we do like about the Church, the people of God, the call to serve, we put in the basket of charism."[292] This approach fails to acknowledge the mistakes the Jesuits themselves have made, as well as to celebrate the gifts of the larger tent of the Catholic Church has and continues to contribute to the greater good. In that whisper that Dollard-O'Malley names, something can be lost. Another participant said, "We think if we don't talk about being Catholic, we can somehow brag about being Jesuit. I think this is a disgrace."[293] Because Jesuits are Catholic, there is no legitimate way to separate the two from one another. There is push-back from some in the Catholic Church at the separation of these two words within the mission, including from some doing mission formation. Coming to

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[290] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[291] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.
[292] Participant F, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[293] Participant A, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.

understand why the tension exists is necessary to begin to build a strategy of how to respond. Within this, it cannot be lost that often the expectation to understand its complexity, the responsibility of determining a way of proceeding, and the challenge of being the spokesperson around this topic often falls to the mission formation employees, all while navigating the other components of their positions.

Tension of Jesuit and Catholic: The Research

When it comes to Jesuit and Catholic, each of the 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States approaches this topic differently on its website both with the focus of its online material, the words emphasized, and even the punctuation used. Consider how Jesuit universities in different regions articulate the reality of this identity. First, Boston College has a webpage dedicated to this topic, called Jesuit, Catholic. In this front page of origins and defining Jesuit education, it provides examples of mission including the core curriculum, the Examen, and data about how many Jesuits are at BC. Only at the end of the page does it say, "Below are several examples that provide a sense of the Jesuit, Catholic dimensions of Boston College's mission."[294] Compare this to Santa Clara University, which has a webpage entitled "Jesuit Catholic Tradition." There is no comma used in this articulation. After describing Jesuit education, it says, "Although the Jesuit tradition comes from the Catholic Church, it resonates across campus with students, staff, and faculty of all backgrounds."[295] A third example is Creighton

[294] "Jesuit, Catholic," Boston College, Accessed August 2023. https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/jesuit-catholic.html.
[295] "Jesuit Catholic Tradition," Santa Clara University, Accessed August 2023, https://www.scu.edu/aboutscu/jesuit-catholic-tradition/.

University, with a website called "The mission statement of Creighton University." Creighton's mission statement is,

> Creighton is a Catholic and Jesuit comprehensive university…As Catholic, Creighton is dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its forms and is guided by the living tradition of the Catholic Church. As Jesuit, Creighton participates in the tradition of the Society of Jesus.[296]

Creighton uses Catholic and Jesuit, putting primacy on the Catholic identifier, while Boston College and Santa Clara opt to begin with Jesuit. At Seattle University, the Mission team settled on Jesuit Catholic because "Jesuit Catholic is the most grammatically correct because Jesuit is the modifier of Catholic."[297] Why is this dialogue necessary? Because it impacts those seeking to understand the nature of the school, both for student recruitment, but also for that of faculty and staff.

A current example of how this debate is impacting Jesuit higher education is that of the updating of the faculty handbook at Seattle University. In 2023, there was a proposed update to the faculty handbook with regard to its Jesuit Catholic roots. In 2004 iteration, the handbook stated,

> As a community of teachers and scholars, the faculty acknowledges the University's religious and cultural traditions and seeks, in a wide variety of ways, to contribute through the professional endeavors of its members to the Jesuit ethos. Seattle University faculty members respect the religious dimension of human life, which is a central element of Jesuit philosophy.[298]

The proposed change for the handbook was:

> Jesuit and Catholic signify the distinctive and defining character of Seattle University. Recognition of the transcendent dimension of human life, as expressed in diverse religious and spiritual traditions, is fundamental to the

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[296] "The mission statement of Creighton University," Creighton University, Accessed August 2023, https://www.creighton.edu/about/mission-history.
[297] Participant C, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[298] Andru Zodrow, "Just a Tad Jesuit: Seattle U Faculty Contest Handbook Changes," *The Spectator*, May 10, 2023.

> identity of a Jesuit university. Seattle University faculty are a community of teacher-scholars with an acknowledgement of and a respect for Catholic religious, intellectual, and cultural traditions, while maintaining their individual faith commitment.[299]

With the inclusion of "respect for Catholic religious traditions," Seattle University faculty were unwilling to move forward. Due to the "uproar" by faculty, the Academic Assembly President and Provost wrote, "We've taken the feedback under consideration and in consultation with [the President and Vice President for Mission Integration], we've decided to withdraw the proposed amendments on Jesuit and Catholic identity for this revision cycle."[300] On one side, there are those who feel a Catholic identity is being forced upon those who are not Catholic. There is fear that their own identities are not celebrated equally, that their academic freedom could be infringed upon, or that there could be a decrease in respect for other religious traditions.[301] This article also named concerns by those who disagree with aspects of the Catholic Church, including social issues like abortion, treatment of the LGBTQ+ community, and lack of gender inclusion in leadership. On the other side of this debate are those with a desire to maintain the authenticity of the Catholic foundation of the institution, as it is what sets it apart from secular institutions. Ultimately, this tension necessitates meaningful listening and educating about the nature of this topic.

Anecdotally, there seems to be a sense that the Catholic Church requires allegiance and adherence to anyone associated with it, even if an employee is not themselves Catholic. It is the Catholic identifier that can feel exclusionary to the religiously unaffiliated population, despite the fact that "Catholic universities should

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[299] Zodrow, "Just a Tad Jesuit."
[300] Zodrow, "Just a Tad Jesuit."
[301] Zodrow, "Just a Tad Jesuit."

welcome people of other communities and faiths, and of no faith, as first-class citizens."[302] Being connected to the Jesuit identifier can feel less complicated, more inviting, and freer for folks without a religious tradition. Some of this stems from the writings done by Jesuits and lay collaborators who help communicate the expectations of those within Jesuit education clearly. Fr. Dan Hartnett, S.J. is among those that have done extensive research and writing around these topics. In his document, "Transformative Education," written for Loyola University Chicago, Hartnett wrote,

> The point is not that researchers [in Jesuit higher education] need to be working on a topic that is identifiably Catholic, nor is the point that people doing research are under the obligation to agree with every element of that tradition. But faculty researchers should be willing and able to articulate how their work elaborates upon the Catholic tradition and how it contributes to the common good.[303]

Without directives and insights like this being shared, one might conclude that a greater emphasis on the Catholic aspect of Jesuit educational mission could involve more specific barriers and parameters. This dialogue and semantic consideration are necessary to understanding the experience of religiously unaffiliated individuals, as it is one additional layer and weight that this population must consider and do labor around. In the same way a person of color carries additional emotional labor in the experiences of microaggressions and systemic racism within an institution, or how women often experience sexism in individuals and structures within an organization, religiously unaffiliated individuals hold the responsibility of understanding the dominant identity of Catholic Christianity on top of the responsibilities of their own spirituality, job responsibilities, and personal life.

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[302] Brackley, S.J., "Higher Standards," Pg. 193.
[303] Hartnett, S.J., "Transformative Education," Pg. 13.

When individuals share that they are comfortable with Jesuit values, but not Catholic values, their starting point is inherently flawed, as all Jesuit values are Catholic. Sadly, the frustrations focused on the Catholic Church often have their own examples within the Jesuit community as well (Ex. sexism, priest abuse, etc.). To suggest the Jesuits are separate from those topics is naïve. Jesuits are part of the nuclear Catholic family, rather than a distant cousin only barely affiliated. Aware of the imperfection of the Jesuits, one can engage in the gifts of the Catholic tradition and not also hold the Jesuits on a pedestal. One Vice President for Mission spoke of her desire to help employees at her institution come to understand that it is precisely the Catholic identity that allows Jesuit universities to operate as they do. For example, she says,

> Because we are Catholic, we can invite people of all faiths to campus. Because we are Catholic, we care for community. The university's commitment is as a Catholic university, and that is not going away. But if we can listen to each other, deeper understanding can happen.[304]

This Vice President is not alone in this perception, as Ignatius himself was known for a both/and attitude.

> For Ignatius, to be a Catholic is to find how the human and divine come together. The figure of Jesus is central to his prayer not only as the privileged object of devotion but also as the exemplar of action. It is this sense of Catholic tradition that most resonates with the pluralism of the university.[305]

It is because of the Catholic identity that a pluralistic and diverse community is desired. There is a need for those in mission formation to listen and hold the perspectives of those who struggle with the Catholic identity, but not at the cost of suggesting that the Catholic

[304] Participant E, Focus Group: Mission Formators, July 25th, 2023.
[305] Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," Pg. 206.

element is optional. These conversations require compassion, listening skills, and openness for all involved.

The previous Father General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Adolfo Nicholas, S.J., spoke of what is necessary for Jesuit mission in higher education in regard to including those without a religious tradition. He wrote,

> Certain elements of the Jesuit mission remain non-negotiable. These include a commitment to excellence, flowing from the *magis*; a clear articulation and enactment of the faith that does justice; interreligious dialogue; a profound sense of an underlying spiritual dynamism; and a careful process of discernment. For Jesuits, these norms stem from clearly Catholic-Christian premises. Others, however, can contribute to the mission and dynamic of Jesuit works from their own specific religious identities or on more secular humanistic grounds. They will never be constrained to embrace the Catholic faith or forfeit their own identity. Yet all companions in mission in a Jesuit-sponsored work will recognize that, for their Jesuit colleagues, the main rational for mission will continue to be deeply rooted in their concern for furthering Jesus' preaching and enactment of the Kingdom of God in its justice and right relationships.[306]

Fr. Nicholas' quote names the ideal balance that maintains authenticity to the tradition and understanding of the gifts of the tradition that transcend religious identity, while clearly articulating that all are invited to participate in the animation of this mission. Individuals can contribute to the values Fr. Nicholas names without either being Catholic or having positive feelings toward the Catholic Church. The faculty at Seattle University were not expressing contempt for the Jesuit mission, but for the inclusion of a respect for Catholic religious traditions. As demonstrated by focus group members who are religiously unaffiliated, as well as the experiences mission formation leaders have with religiously unaffiliated colleagues, the pain caused by the Catholic Church is a real hurdle that causes people to go beyond being indifferent. Though this research does not identify

[306] Adolfo Nicholas, S.J., "Companions in Mission: Pluralism in Action," (keynote, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA. February 2nd, 2009).

strategies for mitigating this tension, the relevant themes from the research continue to open spaces. Those themes include the need for honest and authentic relationships, opportunity to build community, and resources that communicate what is the actual mission in ways that are relevant and accessible for everyone. Ultimately, Fr. Nicholas' encouragement in connection to the institutional Examen process is invitational to all those in mission formation and in leadership of Jesuit colleges and universities as they strive to hold this tension in balance in these institutions. It then becomes the work of each respective institution to animate this call in their unique context and manner.

Focus Group Conclusion

Overall, the focus group experience was one of grace, insight, wisdom, and a few surprises. Generally speaking, staff and administrators responsible for mission formation at their institutions demonstrated deep respect for their religiously unaffiliated colleagues and seemed to enjoy the opportunity to hear from one another. Like the previous focus group, the participants were generous with their time and spirit without compensation or immediately evident benefit to them individually. Again, several participants reached out after the fact to express gratitude for the chance to talk about this topic when they normally feel isolated in the work. These mission formation teams are often small, yet responsible for the totality of the university or college community, leading to roles that were almost entirely outwardly focused and not leaving space for this kind of dialogue regularly. Many shared their gratitude for the research happening, as they too have felt not enough is being said about this population. As the facilitator, the experience of the focus group was one of gratitude and collegiality. More than half of the members had to be rescheduled to another group time or individual interview. Hearing the stories and

contributions of these peers at sister institutions, as well as hearing strategy and ideas that resonated with or inspired other projects was a grace-filled experience. The origin stories to Jesuit education, introduction to mission, and description of the actual roles shed light on how they already do and will continue to intersect with their religiously unaffiliated colleagues. While many of the things they shared about their colleagues were energizing, the reality is that all participants came to these conversations from their own perceptions and experiences. Any number of factors contribute to this, including exhaustion for those with greater longevity in the roles, associating anyone antagonistic to mission as religiously unaffiliated, and the fatigue that comes from regularly being the one doing the inviting and listening. An area for further research could be what is needed to care for the people in these roles trying to be many things to many people. That said, a final topic with additional insights of this group will be included in the next chapter, including suggested resources, programming, and approaches moving ahead.

Conclusion

In conclusion, those responsible for mission formation at Jesuit colleges and universities carry the responsibility of communicating and transmitting the mission of the institution to a diverse constituency that is complex and nuanced. Before understanding how they intersect with their religiously unaffiliated colleagues, it is helpful to understand what brought them to this work, be it a personal experience of Jesuit education, previously holding a position at a Jesuit college or university, or the simple gift of a mentor, friend, or colleague inviting them to consider themselves in the role of mission animator. The various origin stories and particular communities help each person define what the purpose of the position is, with the major themes that emerged including

developing authentic and encouraging relationships, providing space for formation and meaning making to take place, and finally offering meaningful and relevant programs that can deepen employees' understanding of mission. With this foundation set, the focus groups turned to their understanding of and connection to religiously unaffiliated employees at their institutions. Because perceptions impact behavior, it was necessary to inquire about their feelings toward religiously unaffiliated colleagues. Beyond that, the stories shared included the contributions their colleagues made, acknowledgement of the sticking points of mission that are complicated for this population, and a look at the complexity of being a Jesuit Catholic institution when Catholic sometimes holds negative connotation for individuals. Though not shared in this chapter, the focus group also shared ideas for better supporting this population moving forward, ideas that can contribute to the following chapter. By listening to the wisdom of those whose jobs were created to help animate mission, an undercurrent of respect and admiration for religiously unaffiliated colleagues emerged. This emerging admiration lays the groundwork for establishing an ethos of seeing everyone as possibly contributors and leaders in the work of institutional mission, which will carry forward into chapter five.

Chapter Five: Key Findings and Suggested Ways of Proceeding

Introduction

"Choosing a model without giving due consideration to the purpose or purposes for which it is going to be employed could generate a whole variety of unintended and even unwelcome effects," writes Ed Foley.[307] As the question of engaging and honoring the contributions of religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities becomes a more pressing dialogue, the need to give consideration for the goal and purpose of this engagement becomes primary. To effectively invite this population to the work of mission, a model must be selected that takes into account the gifts of the tradition, the perspectives of the population, and the desires of those doing the inviting. This chapter will articulate the key themes found in each of the previous chapters and suggest key takeaways given those themes. This chapter will synthesize the findings of the various sources, including the narratives from focus groups and interviews, specific documents from the Society of Jesus previously mentioned, and the various scholarly works that contributed to an understanding of Jesuit education, those who are religiously unaffiliated, and the work of those in mission formation. This synthesis will help demonstrate the need and opportunity of the Ignatian vision in today's higher educational environment.

Given the themes and takeaways, this chapter will offer recommendations for best practices in Jesuit higher education. The suggested strategies and tactics can affirm the

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[307] Ed Foley, *Theological Reflection Across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing,* (Rowman & Littlefield: New York, 2015), 47.

work of some mission formators, while also providing different approaches or ideas as each institution adapts their approach to meet the context and needs of their respective institutions. Finally, this chapter will return to the topic of belonging, both in its importance for employees generally, but also how the Ignatian vision can contribute to religiously unaffiliated employees deepening their sense of belonging.

Synthesis of Previous Chapters

Each of the previous three chapters provided content and insight about three topics that contribute to an understanding of the connection of religiously unaffiliated employees in Jesuit higher education to the animation of an institution's Jesuit, Catholic mission. The second chapter provided an overview of what that educational mission is about, including the three core categories: Ignatian spirituality, a faith that does justice, and academic excellence. Through the exploration of these three categories, a variety of concepts were explored in light of how they might be accessible and relevant for those without a religious tradition. Part of the accessibility will depend on the language used and the freedom of the institution to allow for the emerging mission to be expressed in new and innovative ways. The third chapter focused specifically on religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit education, giving context to this community broadly outside of education, acknowledging perceptions of the population, and then shifting to the stories of members of this population that work in Jesuit higher education. Their stories of relationships, connecting points to the mission, and struggles within the institution will contribute to strategies and practices moving forward with the aim of supporting and engaging this population more meaningfully. Chapter four shifted the focus to those responsible for mission formation. This group of Vice Presidents, mission

officers, and other staff shared their own narratives of the purpose and logistics of their work, how they currently engage with this population, and the challenges that need to be acknowledged and attended to in order to more fully engage their religiously unaffiliated colleagues. The focused synthesis of these three chapters will inform the suggested ways of proceeding in light of strategy, accessibility, and practice moving forward.

Chapter Two Themes and Takeaways

Chapter two tackled the mission of Jesuit higher education; a mission that is complex, nuanced, and with many entry points, including but not limited to Ignatian spirituality, a faith that does justice, and academic pedagogical excellence. The first of these three areas of entry is Ignatian spirituality. This spirituality is rooted in the belief that "God works in all toward good, not evil; toward consolation, not desolation; toward building up justice, faith, hope, confidence, human freedom, and productivity."[308] The values identified by the late Fr. Howard Gray, S.J., namely that of justice, faith, hope, and human freedom are at the foundational core of the various components of Ignatian spirituality. The chapter both unpacked context and meaning of terminology, practices, and values of Ignatian spirituality, while demonstrating accessibility for those without a faith tradition. Three key insights emerged from this exploration, namely that of how the reciprocity of this spirituality leads to deeper commitment and a sense of belonging, the primacy of acknowledging and integrating experience, and finally, the gift of shared approach and language for a community.

[308] Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," 199.

When one encounters the rich gifts of Ignatian spirituality, there is a deeper sense of how to offer that same gift to others. Chapter one unpacked the importance of the phrase *cura personalis* or care for the whole, unique person. On one hand, there is grace in receiving holistic and intentional care as an employee and member of a community. On the other hand, there is also grace in being the one to provide that kind of care to someone else. Being a contributing member to a community that is striving to be a place of care for every member helps contribute to a sense of purpose and belonging for the caregiver. Being a recipient of that kind of care inspires one to respond, a response rooted in caring for others. This reciprocity is also seen in the presupposition of the Spiritual Exercises. As one feels that their perspective and actions will be viewed through a lens of presupposing good intent, the ability to assume that good in someone else becomes more cultural and available. Receiving grace and consideration from a community invites a sense of freedom, belonging, and authenticity regardless of how one defines their religious or spiritual life. Another insight from this section is the importance of paying attention to and exploring one's experience. One's experience of receiving individual care or having good intent assumed is what can lead to one offering those gifts to others.

Experience remains pivotal in other Ignatian spirituality areas as well, particularly in discernment and the Examen. The Ignatian approach to discernment is deeply personal, inviting an individual to pay attention to the inner movements of their hearts. This attention affirms one's experience and allows for both a savoring of gifts and space to grow. The Rules of Discernment from the Spiritual Exercises cover a wide range of topics, but several can be relevant to those without a religious tradition. For example, understanding the difference between consolation and desolation opens unique entry

points for examining one's experience as well. The Examen at its core is a prayer and reflection tool available for those seeking to explore their experiences with a particular lens. Finally, specific language can help make the Examen and other elements of the spirituality remain authentically Ignatian, while also being accessible for those uncomfortable with language of religion. For example, the Scriptures clearly name that God is love. If individuals without a religious tradition use the Examen to reflect on the presence and absence of love in their lives, are they not (by way of the transitive property in mathematics) exploring the presence and absence of what Christians would name as God? This importance of shared language and interpretation of language is key in the development of an employee culture, as well as a wider communal identity. This section also demonstrated how the topic of freedom and attachment is useful in both personal and professional situations. Specifically in a professional setting, an understanding of freedom can provide language to colleagues needing to have difficult conversations around traditions, budgets, with employees, and so on. The reciprocity, primacy of experience, and gifts of shared language come directly from Ignatian spirituality.

The second section of this chapter focused specifically on a faith that does justice. The letter of James states, "But perhaps someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and by works I will show you my faith."[309] The works James is referencing includes the work of justice and advocacy. The topic of social justice a core of mission in Jesuit higher education is one of the most invoked

[309] James 2:18. New Catholic Bible.

elements of this approach to education. While the chapter demonstrated the various sources contributing to a unique approach to the work of justice in a Jesuit, Catholic environment, it also shared current examples of how that mission is at work in the United States. Within the sources contributing to a working understanding of a faith that does justice, one sees themes of desire to contribute, for solidarity, for inclusive and invitational language, and a true call to action. Particular meditations and movements within the Spiritual Exercises invite one to consider what their unique contributions will be to the work of justice. While the Spiritual Exercises are inherently a program with the purpose of deepening one's intimacy with God, the resulting actions and responses can be more universal in nature. If good-willed individuals want to find their way to support the work of solidarity and justice, this can be part of the wider conversation of a Jesuit approach to social justice.

As Howard Gray wrote, "What is remarkable about this process, as a process, does not demand that one be a Catholic, much less be a Jesuit. It is soul education, a process that invites [people] to trust their experience as a source of revelation and direction."[310] This is an invitational mission that goes beyond religious identity. That said, knowing the roots within the Catholic and Jesuit tradition is part of this "brand" of justice. A faith that does justice implies that faith is the catalyst for putting justice into action. This stems from Catholic Social Teaching and from 20th century Jesuit leadership. In the former, CST provides a number of principles for justice, including the dignity of the human person or care for creation, that when examined does not explicitly demand a religious affiliation to back. As James Martin wrote "This doesn't mean that you need to

[310] Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," 199-200.

believe in God in order to find Ignatius's insights useful. But to do so, you have to understand where God fits into his worldview."[311] The background and context of this approach to justice matters. In the latter, Pedro Arrupe, S.J. and Peter Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. either wrote or presented a more modern take on the purpose of Jesuit education and an approach to justice. Simply put, the theme is Jesuit education must do this or it is not living up to its purpose. The modern Jesuit college or university must be developing students, employees, and other community members into people for and with others. This "all hands-on deck" invitation to justice also is much bigger than religious division. The faith that does justice category provides a wide range of entry points for all those involved in Jesuit education.

Finally, the third section of this chapter explored the depth and invitation of academic excellence and the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm within the mission. The key takeaways from this section focus primarily on what Jesuit education literally is, who is involved in the overall project, and how does the academic work distinguish itself from other forms of education. To say academic educational excellence is implicit in the mission is an understatement. As Howard Gray described Jesuit education as "a way of proceeding within one's profession, a style of professional alertness and dedication; that enables a person to become 'a soul,' someone trying to live in mutuality with or openness to all other realities."[312] It is precisely that dedication and alertness that contributes to a high standard for excellence, as well as motivation for those involved. This excellence spans the various fields, faculty, and staff positions. The brand of Jesuit education implies

[311] Martin, S.J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything,* 29.
[312] Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," 200.

a commitment to the liberal arts, the inclusion of moral and ethical topics within curriculum, and an expectation that education should lead to action in the world outside the university.

This chapter highlighted the importance of the who and how of living the Jesuit educational mission. The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities is a formal institution that promotes networking and collaboration among institutions. While the mission gets lived uniquely in each institution based on their context, geography, community make-up, and so forth, there is a shared language and purpose to Jesuit education that also creates informal connection to those within the network. The theme of relationships will remain significant throughout the remainder of this thesis project. The *how* of Jesuit education is a key takeaway for all those faculty and staff at Jesuit institutions. The Jesuit educational approach includes a commitment to authentic dialogue, where different opinions and perspectives can be heard and respected. These dialogues are often created and facilitated by faculty and staff both with students and with other colleagues. The premier academic pedagogy for Jesuit education is the Pedagogical Paradigm, which roots affiliated individuals in their context, experience, reflection, subsequent action, and evaluation. This pedagogy, also coming from the 20th century, demonstrates that academic excellence is not the end result, but the means to the end. The end goal of Jesuit education is to develop individuals into people of "competence, conscience, and compassion."[313] While one's religious tradition contributes to one's context, the lack of a religious tradition does not eliminate someone's capacity to engage

[313] "The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm," Xavier University, Accessed October 19, 2023, https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/resources-by-theme/ignatian-pedagogy.

in this pedagogy. In each of these three themes around academic excellence, religiously unaffiliated employees have every opportunity to contribute to the lived expression of mission in their respective institutions.

Chapter Three Themes and Takeaways

Chapter three focused on the experiences of religiously unaffiliated individuals, both broadly in current culture, as well as the specific stories of those working at Jesuit colleges and universities. Among the research of this particular population is an understanding of the diversity within the group based on values, nomenclature, gender, and so forth. Within the umbrella of religiously unaffiliated includes those who have come from a religious tradition but opted to remove themselves from that particular community or to folks who have no experience in any tradition at all. Despite the diversity within the group, there are stereotypes and perceptions generally that members of this identity encounter in a variety of contexts in their life, including their work environment. This religious category continues to increase in the United States, as it has over the last several decades, with no apparent slowing down on the horizon.

With an understanding of the general population, the third chapter shared the experiences, wisdom, and insights of both interviews and focus groups of religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities. This exploration yielded a variety of key themes that will contribute to a way of proceeding in working with this population, namely the importance of relationship/relationship-building, the value of being able to see oneself as contributing through the career opportunity (particularly when in alignment with one's own values), and the way programs can enhance or harm one's perception of what the mission actually is at their institutions. The first of these

themes is the primacy of relationships, a theme already recognized at multiple points in this project. Relationships were foundational to these employees being open to seeking positions in Jesuit institutions, as well as in receiving language and action to demonstrate the mission. These relationships were not those of power, but of companionship, listening, and affirming the gifts the employee was bringing to the institution. Relationships with peers, supervisors, mentors, or mission formation staff were on the forefront of the formational moments of mission for each of the individuals interviewed. The content was possible *because* of the relationships that were forming or were already formed. Being connected to someone at the institution (especially someone with perceived authority about the mission) helped assuage feelings of self-doubt or exclusion from the broader community. Relationships that mirrored the values of *cura personalis* helped establish the idea that every member of the community can animate the mission in a unique way, regardless of the identities they hold. Relationships are at the core of what this work is about.

The second theme emerging from this chapter is how important it is for individuals to see opportunities to contribute professionally, missionally, or personally to the endeavor of higher education. While job opportunities themselves were part of what brought religiously unaffiliated people to their places of employment in the first place, being encouraged to incorporate mission in ways that were relevant and organic helped these individuals feel part of the community, as well as excited and more committed to the mission itself. The examples of this included curriculum development in a variety of fields, supporting the justice initiatives of their institutions, and determining *how* they want to approach their work in ways that are inclusive and authentic to both their values

and the values of Jesuit education. This population often contributes to the mission through a shared desire to seek the common good. The late Howard Gray wrote, "Pluralism has to be an ethical relationship, some mutual commitment to the good that can be obtained precisely because there are different opinions."[314] It is precisely the shared vision of working toward the common good that unites those working in Jesuit education. The mutuality of the goal and action of Jesuit education allows inclusion and celebration of those who do not hold the dominant religious identity. Those interviewed articulated social justice as a primary value they hold that overlapped with their institution's mission, a value they sought to weave into whatever role they held, either faculty or staff. This connection was more than mere words; this is the place where they believe they are able to make the greatest contributions, which invites them more deeply into the mission itself. Each time there is alignment of personal values with university mission, the person is able to see themselves more clearly as part of something bigger than themselves, as a contributing member. That ability to contribute rather than just receive mission language is key and impacts one's sense of belonging overall.

Finally, the third takeaway from the third chapter was the importance of programming as a means of communicating and inviting one into mission. Optional programs will yield a cohort of participants that are there willingly and bring an open spirit to learning and engaging. Mandatory programs, when done effectively, can also achieve an outcome of inviting others into an understanding of various components of mission. The most effective mission programming includes presenters that are fluent in university culture, making the topics of mission relevant to a wide audience, but also

[314] Gray, S.J., "Soul Education," 204.

representing areas or positions that are not explicitly mission focused. Inviting speakers who represent many areas of the university demonstrates to participants the diversity in the ways mission is lived, as well as being able to see themselves in similar roles. As Vice President for Mission at Xavier University Debra Mooney wrote,

> It speaks more to have an assistant professor of mathematics describe the way she fosters social justice education in her classes, a Jewish academic advisor outlines the mission statement, a groundskeeper offers the opening prayer, and a computer technologist highlight the life of St. Ignatius Loyola and historical points in the founding of the university. New hires see themselves through the various speakers. In short, a sense of belongingness and mission consciousness developed at orientation lays critical foundation for deeper engagement.[315]

As noted in chapter four, mission officers and Vice Presidents hold a homogenous religious identity. By engaging with the wider community in communicating what mission is and how it is lived, there is greater likelihood that a religiously unaffiliated employee could recognize that a religious tradition is not required to be a mission animator.

Programs also do well to build relationships and community among employees. The frustration of silos consistently comes up as a complaint of university life, and mission programming can be a place that helps to break down some of those barriers. Finally, programs that invite employees to engage in the spiritual pedagogy of the mission contribute to religiously unaffiliated individuals being able to see themselves as part of the mission. Programs that invite an employee to receive messaging around the importance of reflecting on one's experience, making space for silence, and the invitation to rest all contribute to one's wellbeing and one's sense of being cared for in their place

[315] Debra Mooney, "Red Hots, Tic Tacs, and M&Ms: Mission Effectiveness Flows from a Culture of Belonging," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 56, (January 2020): 21.

of employment. For those things to be part of mission consciousness invites deeper connection to and desire for greater understanding of mission.

Chapter Four Themes and Takeaways

After learning from the wisdom of the religiously unaffiliated employees, the fourth chapter set out to understand those responsible for communicating mission to the rest of the community. The task of helping those outside traditional mission roles to see themselves as part of the mission make-up of an institution is not limited to Jesuit Higher Education, but extends to other Catholic colleges and universities, as well as into other mission-driven organizations like hospitals. Hearing from individuals in these roles illuminated the importance of the personality and experience of mission officers/employees, demonstrated the complexity with working with religiously unaffiliated colleagues, and articulated the complexity of working within the Jesuit Catholic identity. These themes emerged from topics like hearing what brought these employees to Jesuit education, what they identify as their purpose in the role, the challenges of this work, and meaningful conversation around their work with their religiously unaffiliated colleagues.

The first key takeaway coming from the fourth chapter is how unique the role of doing mission formation is. With that uniqueness, the personality and experiences of those who hold the roles is key in how others will be drawn into the mission. The majority of those in these roles have experience in Jesuit education, either at the high school or collegiate level. These individuals internalized their own educational experience in a way that transformed their own understanding of the world and their roles within it. These experiences rooted them in their own relationships of care, concrete

examples of the transformative power of Jesuit education, and in an invitation to contribute to this endeavor. Those in mission formation work also have academic experience connected to the mission, in theology, pastoral ministry, spiritual direction, and/or education. They come with a lived and studied sense of what the mission is, as well as with the educational skills of being able to teach, build relationships, and administer logistics necessary for those priorities to thrive. To be most effective, these employees must balance the need to educate, minister, speak, create, facilitate, build community, and re-envision. These roles necessitate an understanding and relationship to the Catholic Church in their local community, as well as the global Church, while also being positioned within a complex and diverse university system. If the work was within a church, those they served would share a faith identity. However, within higher education, the population mission officers serve subsists of a spectrum of religious identities. Being effective communicators includes being able to listen, particularly for those who hold marginalized identities in the local and broader community. They are meant to invite and inspire others to pick up the mantel of mission, claiming it as their own. This work asks someone to be nuanced, balanced, and open to change and adaptation for diverse audiences. These standards are the best scenario, but also speak to the complexity of the roles themselves.

The second theme arising from chapter four is the lived expression of working with religiously unaffiliated colleagues. One important takeaway from this research is the need to differentiate between religiously unaffiliated employees and antagonistic employees. For some mission formation staff, the frustrations attempting to work with those in opposition to the university's mission for any number of reasons can become

overwhelming and exhausting. As those in these roles encounter folks open to learning, embracing, and contributing to mission, there develops a greater hope and capacity for the work itself, as the work feels shared. Another important takeaway from this chapter is that it is hard to know which colleagues are religiously unaffiliated in the first place. Outside of someone self-identifying in this way, there is no way of knowing one's faith affiliation. This necessitates best practices to make assumptions that, particularly for programs, groups will always include those from a spectrum of religious identity, requiring the program to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible. While this does not mean there should be no mention of the religious identity of the institution, framing that identity in a way that is authentic but also inviting is imperative. Finally, these interviews yielded a deep sense of the contributions of religiously unaffiliated employees at Jesuit colleges and universities. Those in mission formation named the notable impacts this population made to the work of social justice and the common good, in a variety of areas of academic excellence, and by bringing a diverse set of opinions as only those outside the tradition can bring. Those opinions can offer critique, suggestion, and things to celebrate that could be missed by those immersed within the tradition. It is clear from this research that there is a desire to continue to understand the religiously unaffiliated population of their institutions more deeply, while also supporting the many ways they contribute to mission.

The third theme in this chapter was the complexity and tension of the Jesuit, Catholic identity of Jesuit higher education. All Jesuits are Catholic, as the Society of Jesus is a Catholic order. However, there are often perceptions and suggestions that one can connect to the Jesuit part of the mission, without being connected to the Catholic

Church. Because of perception and direct experience, there are many individuals who associate the Catholic Church with the priest abuse that plagued the church globally, discrimination and hatred toward the LGBTQ+ community, and the prevention of women in the priesthood. Though these plagues are also part of the Society of Jesus, the perception of the Jesuits being "liberal" has, in some cases, shielded them from the direct antagonism some feel toward the Catholic Church. On one hand, which split invites people into a Catholic ethos through a door that feels more resonant for them than other parts of the Church. On the other hand, the separation of Jesuit and Catholic is inherently a fallacy. This reality can be seen in other contexts as well. For example, the average Chicagoan, when asked where they are from, will say Chicago rather than Illinois. While Chicago is 100% located within the state of Illinois, there are many who only want to associate with Chicago because of a difference of politics, diversity, and so forth.

That said, those in mission formation are the ones who receive the brunt of these tensions. They are often the ones who receive the frustration of this dynamic, as they are seen as the bridge to the other perspective. Mission formation folks, predominantly if not exclusively Catholic, end up hearing opinions against their own faith tradition and have to navigate the need to both honor their own beliefs while also making space to listen to those who may not share the same desire to hear and understand. Roger Haight, a Jesuit intrigued by the experience of religious seekers, wrote,

> The intrinsic rhetorical problem of finding the right language remains. It will not be resolved without patience from each side of the issue: tolerance on the part of Christians who expect to hear more about Jesus' divinity, and tolerance on the part of secular seekers who may hear too much of it.[316]

[316] Haight, *Christian Spirituality for Seekers: Reflections on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola,* 90.

Ultimately, patience and a willingness to learn is ideal for these environments and often the mission individual ends up needing to demonstrate that spirit of openness first. Layered into the already almost unattainable qualities of an ideal person for mission formation must also include this exhausting labor needed to build the community where dialogue can occur.

Each of the previous three chapters shed light on the depth and benefits of Jesuit education, the need for commitment to the mission by employees regardless of their faith identity, and the importance of supporting those responsible for mission formation. The first chapter set out to name the pillars of Jesuit education mission, while locating opportunities and access points for those who are religiously unaffiliated. What emerged from that exploration was the importance of the ways Ignatian spirituality is reciprocal and more able to replicate once one has experienced the benefits, the universal value in spending time and integrating one's experiences, and the gift of having clearly articulated values and approaches for those working within a shared institution. The second chapter focused on the lived experiences of religiously unaffiliated employees in Jesuit higher education, through a brief exploration of national trends and perceptions and a more significant listening to those in this demographic that are committed to the mission of their Jesuit institutions.

Emerging from this chapter are the primacy of relationships as means of connection, the importance of being able to see oneself as a contributing member of the community's mission efforts, and the opportunities and suggestions of programming that can help inform a shared understanding of mission. Finally, the third chapter explored the role and experiences of those responsible for mission formation. In considering the

growing need and trend to the development of these positions, the individuals in these positions were able to share their experiences as well. In this consideration, what became known was the importance of hiring the right individuals into these positions because the necessary skills are vast and complicated, with a great emphasis on their ability to build relationships and maneuver the complexity of working with a wide spectrum of individuals, including religiously unaffiliated colleagues. Finally, this chapter highlighted the tension that exists with the Jesuit, Catholic roots of the mission and how that tension can impact those in these positions. Pulling these various themes together will serve as the foundation for a way of proceeding in the section ahead.

Suggested Ways of Proceeding

When someone prays with the Examen, the final step is to look forward and consider how the learnings of this reflection impact one's desires, hopes, and commitments to action moving forward. This parallel is also seen in the Ignatian pedagogical paradigm. It is only fitting that utilizing the emerging themes and insights from the research of this thesis project allows for a formulation and facilitation of a comprehensive way of proceeding within Jesuit higher education nationally and in respective institutions locally. This way of proceeding includes specific strategies and values for the work itself using practical and tangible tactics and concluding with an emphasis on the importance of belonging for this work. Each of these areas will be articulated in the following section. The strategies and values involved will aid in both inviting and honoring religiously unaffiliated employees to recognize themselves within the mission and parallel the three areas of what the mission is. Rather than defining each area again, the inherent values of the spirituality, of the unique approach to social justice,

and the utilization of the actual pedagogical paradigm of Jesuit education demonstrate an integrated approach to this work.

While previous sections articulate which of the Jesuit buzz words and specific nomenclature of Ignatian spirituality are accessible and relevant to religiously unaffiliated employees, this section seeks to demonstrate how the lived expression of those values is necessary to do the actual work of mission formation. This includes the importance of bringing awareness to and making meaning of one's experiences, encouraging individuals to be aware of feelings in addition to thoughts, and incorporating silence and rest. Each of these strategies will contribute to spaces that are expressions of mission while being open and accessible for those without a faith tradition.

Strategies from the Spiritual Tradition

To begin, centering one's experience of their professional and personal lives allows a person to recognize their conscious and unconscious values. Giving a person the chance to both do this reflection and then also share those experiences with others as equals helps break down senses of hierarchy and power. This strategy recognizes the contributions of everyone involved, helping to create a place of belonging for individuals with whatever identities they hold. By paying attention to experience, it "reveals our meaning making capacity to situate our lives within an ultimate context and make sense of ourselves in the world."[317] These results will both contribute to the work of justice and pedagogy moving forward and also practically help prepare people to manage the chaos

[317] C.J. Fowler, and Cody J. Sanders, "Injustice and the Care of Queer Souls," *Injustice and the Care of Souls, 2nd edition,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 218.

and shifting circumstances of one's work and home life. As Fr. Bryan Massingale wrote, "Successfully navigating [social crises] requires responses beyond technical reason or social policy; these are dead ends that only reinforce human hopelessness. A world of justice demands interior conversion and spiritual evolution."[318] The strategy of centering experience is necessary for mission work and will demonstrate an honoring of all those involved in the program or discussions. One concrete tactic of this is to centralize the expertise of employees in their respective fields. Mission formators can encourage and empower colleagues, particularly those who are religiously unaffiliated, to see themselves as mission leaders by highlighting their work and its connection to mission. This could involve holding collaborative speaking engagements between mission and any academic department (Ex. The overlap of psychology and spirituality; Business and justice; chemistry and care of creation; exercise science and ritual; social work and the poor; the list goes on) or simply having 1:1 conversations with employees about their work and how it animates them. The focus group of religiously unaffiliated individuals shared the importance of those with some understood authority on mission affirming their experiences and expertise in their journey to see themselves within the mission. Experience and expertise are key strategies for this work.

A second strategy for mission work coming from the Ignatian spiritual tradition is the need to incorporate both one's thoughts ***and*** feelings into one's discernment and understanding of experience. While higher education lends itself to an intellectual approach to problem-solving, planning, or gaining knowledge, the Ignatian tradition

[318] Bryan Massingale, *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse,* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic. 2021), 339.

places emphasis on the importance of one's affect. Anthony de Mello, S.J., a celebrated spiritual teacher and psychotherapist, is known for his many celebrated spiritual writings that lean into the eastern traditions of his Indian roots while animating Ignatian spirituality. He wrote, "You must learn to move out of the area of thinking and talking and move into the area of feeling, sensing, loving, intuiting."[319] Engaging one's emotions helps develop relationships, understand passion, respond to places of anger and pain, and helps transform those involved. Creating mission spaces that connect to one's feelings will deepen a person's connection to the mission.

Finally, making space for quiet within mission work serves as a gift to those involved. While this happens naturally on retreats, both communal and silent, the presence of actual silence in seminars or orientations is what can create the space for the reflection of experience and emotions discussed above. Jesuit mission is inherently experiential. Therefore, any mission programming should demonstrate that value both in the invitation to reflection, but also in the creation of that space of silence. Silence, rest, or retreat are all deeply part of the Ignatian tradition and should be directly offered to employees as a means of caring for them. The language used for recruitment and describing the retreats should be clear to articulate an inclusivity for those from any or no faith tradition. Those without a religious tradition can still benefit from the silence, space for rest, and opportunity for retreat. Silence and retreats bring together the strategies of focusing on experience and feelings, demonstrating how the values from the spiritual

[319] Anthony De Mello, S.J., *Sadhana: A Way to God*, (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 13.

tradition can contribute to a comprehensive way of proceeding for mission work with religiously unaffiliated employees.

Strategies Rooted in Justice

The second component of Jesuit mission is a faith that does justice, or an approach of social justice that is rooted in Catholic and explicitly Jesuit tradition. The values and outcomes of social justice work help express other strategies for mission formation. These values include an inclusive and affirming approach to those on the margins, a clear articulation of the gifts of Catholic Social Teaching and the Jesuit justice tradition, and genuine action toward reconciliation and justice. The first strategy is the inclusion of a preferential option for affirming and supporting those on the margins, including but not limited to: religiously unaffiliated individuals, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, and anyone else that has been harmed by historical and current systems of oppression. This strategy can be included in a variety of ways, including in representation, presentations, and presence. The work begins by asking those in mission formation to be aware of who is marginalized on campus, which in a Jesuit higher educational setting, includes those listed above and specifically those who are religiously unaffiliated. Mission formators can go beyond inviting those without a religious tradition to programming, but actually center the voices of this population as part of the program itself. For example, if a mission orientation includes a panel of staff who live the mission, be sure to include and honor someone with this identity. If there are opportunities to nominate religiously unaffiliated colleagues for the various recognitions that often occur, make this a priority.

Affirmation of these populations also happens within presentations to orientations, public prayers, or smaller groups like seminars or discussions. There are ways to name the diversity in a space without minimizing the Catholic and Jesuit roots of the mission. For example, a presenter could directly say something like, “We recognize the rich religious diversity in the room, which includes those who are religiously unaffiliated. Please feel free to approach the spiritual language of this tradition in whatever way is most authentic for you.” This helps this population know they are seen and welcome, while also empowering them to self-select, interpret, and appropriate the mission in ways that are true to their values and approach to life. This topic emerged during the focus group for religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities, as there was a desire for more inclusion of atheist/non-religious identity into the way their respective institutions name the diversity of experiences within their community. Language and the naming of the group in presentations and public spaces can honor the inclusion of this population.

Finally, there are a myriad of adages and quotes about the importance of presence and showing up for others. Being present and available for individuals that are religiously unaffiliated helps communicate care and respect for the person inclusive and affirming of their identities. This could mean having 1:1 conversations with those that are hoping to learn more about mission, but more relevant for this strategy is being available for conversations to listen and hear about the experiences of the marginalized person. On a larger scale, mission formators should be available to show up for events and programs that honor marginalized people. This could mean attending things like prayers services for the LGBTQ+ community, an award ceremony for staff of color, or discussion groups

for those wanting to unpack the lived experience of distilling religious language for those with no religious tradition. By focusing on representation, the language and focus of presentations, and being available and present for religiously unaffiliated employees, mission formators can help continue to create spaces of welcome and belonging, which will lead to deeper connection and commitment to the mission of the institution itself.

A second strategy from this approach to mission formation is the inclusion of clear articulation of how the traditions of Jesuit education inform social justice while acknowledging the complicated history of the Catholic tradition. Being clear about social justice having different context and nuance in a Jesuit educational setting both can result in a shared vision of the work, as well as help create a bridge to greater awareness and appreciation for the tradition. The bridge is not one-sided, where religiously unaffiliated individuals are asked to come to the side of the Catholic Church, but a bridge to recognizing shared values in the midst of knowing what the foundation for the bridge is in the first place. The sharing of Catholic Social Teaching or the wisdom of 20th century Jesuit presentations and writing about justice in the modern world provides content for discussion and interpretation as a community. While those in mission formation need not apologize for being from Catholic and Jesuit roots, they should be available to listen to the wounds that colleagues have due to connection to the Catholic Church. The mission formator should find ways to hold the pain others express, maintain the gifts of the Catholic tradition, and also perhaps look for ways to normalize being part of something while having critique of it. As previously noted in chapter three, a member of the religiously unaffiliated focus group shared that during a retreat she participated in for the Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP), she heard a Catholic woman name some of her own

frustrations of the Church. She said, "I appreciated the openness to see places where we overlap, which I found more affirming than I expected. I wish we had more spaces like that."[320] Being willing to wrestle with things that are uncomfortable within a community can create spaces for authentic dialogue and connection. Demonstrating an ability to hold tension and nuance helps create a more developed and fuller picture of the work but creates an opportunity for those who think one needs to find the Catholic Church to be perfection in order to participate. Part of a commitment to justice is a clear articulation and listening to the concerns about the Catholic identity.

Finally, a strategy of justice for doing mission formation work for religiously unaffiliated individuals is demonstrating desire and action toward reconciliation. Those in mission formation do well to participate in opportunities for action and learning in areas of justice, particularly in supporting colleagues with greater expertise in particular areas (Ex. Homelessness, racism, homophobia, etc.). They should also look to create opportunities for others to engage in the rich tradition of justice work and advocacy in the Jesuit tradition. This could take the shape of employee service days, organizing acts of advocacy, or developing immersion opportunities within the school's local community to those who are poor and marginalized. This could involve paying attention to the needs of the world (Ex. war, natural disaster, mass shootings, etc.) and being part of the university's response to those who are suffering. Additionally, part of justice work is the work of reconciliation and lament. Chapter one discussed Georgetown's current work around reparations and reconciliation with the descendants of the 272 enslaved people that helped build Georgetown in the 1700's. Each institution has an opportunity to

[320] Participant 2, Focus Group: Religiously Unaffiliated Employees, July 20th, 2023.

discern their own reconciliation process, and those in mission work should find ways to be part of that effort, particularly in ensuring the voices of those harmed are elevated. As multifaith chaplain Rev. William Blaine-Wallace wrote, "A good percentage of reconciliation processes fail because the victims are decentered…The voices of the victims are patronized and, at worst, silenced."[321] It is the responsibility of those who formally represent mission to live from these particular values both in how they create opportunities for others *and* in their general interactions with other parts of the institution.

Pedagogical Strategies

Finally, a third area of strategy for developing opportunities and resources for supporting religiously unaffiliated employees is to utilize the strength of Jesuit educational pedagogy. Rather than just talking about pedagogy, mission formators have the chance to demonstrate what that means in the *how* of mission work. A few of the most obvious values necessary for this work include a focus on being relationship-focused, being open to change and growth, and recognizing the trajectory of a commitment to mission.

The first of these values is the primacy of relationships and building community demonstrated throughout the interviews and focus groups of both religiously unaffiliated employees and those involved in mission formation. Relationship is at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises, of a Jesuit approach to social justice, and at the root of a pedagogical approach. This said, engaging employees in the area of mission should often, if not always, be rooted in a relational context. While the Ignatian Colleagues Program (ICP) is

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[321] William Blaine-Wallace, "The Politics of Tears," *Injustice and the Care of Souls, 2nd edition,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023), 146.

a national program with a goal of helping connect employees of Jesuit colleges and universities more deeply to the mission, another goal and dynamic grace of the program is the networking and development of the cohort experiencing the program together. Faculty or staff seminars that invite a cohort of colleagues from different areas of the university helps develop a wider network, establish a community of care for each other and whoever their constituents are, and create learning environments for those in the community that are not students. This translates to providing informal space for organic connections to develop and making opportunities to share one's experiences with other members of the group. As people feel more comfortable sharing their own stories and identities, deeper understanding and connection occurs. This contributes to the sense of being part of something, of belonging to a group with a shared vision and purpose with all that they are. Finally, an idea that arose from the religiously unaffiliated focus group was the idea of creating space for an affinity group for religiously unaffiliated employees. Having those in mission offer intentional time and space for this group to gather demonstrates a commitment to supporting this population, allows for relationships among that population to develop, and could yield deeper commitment to the mission itself. Ultimately, programs inviting employees to mission should always consider how to incorporate nourishing relationships and connections among colleagues within their goals and pedagogy.

A second value to strategy arising from a pedagogical approach to mission formation is that of evaluation and adaptability. Within the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, one is asked to reflect on what happened in order to discern how to proceed differently moving forward. This freedom and openness to feedback, changing what has

"always been done," and adapting to new knowledge and understanding demonstrates the emerging nature of the mission while still being rooted in a deep tradition. In her work *Teaching to Transgress*, author and educator bel hooks looks at how to shift education to make it more inclusive for those of marginalized backgrounds. She writes, "Any effort to transform institutions so that they reflect a multi-cultural standpoint must take into consideration the fears teachers have when asked to shift their paradigms."[322] It is natural for people to be attached to programs and ways of doing things that have been successful or made a difference within their community. However, as the understanding of culture, inclusion, and expressions of mission continues to change, those responsible for formation must discern how to maintain the authenticity of the mission from the logistics of how it is communicated and appropriated by the community. As practical theologian Ed Foley wrote,

> Playing our methodological trump suit without assessing critically the purposes of the language game before us could raise the toll on this communication highway higher than some of our intended dialogue partners are willing to pay…it is important to see the light before choosing the path; in other words, first discern the *why* of the process before deciding upon a *how*.[323]

The question of why mission formation is done and why a particular program contributes to an overall goal should help determine how to approach the task, as it will give a fuller picture of what is needed.

Finally, one of the great gifts that mission formators noted about religiously unaffiliated employees is their ability to bring a fresh perspective to the tradition that is difficult for those that are submersed within it. Honoring this gift asks mission formators

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[322] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress,* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 1994), 36.
[323] Foley, *Theological Reflection Across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing,* 48.

to genuinely listen, discern, and act on how to make things more inclusive and affirming of all colleagues. While being careful not to tokenize members of this community, inviting their perspectives into this work could yield greater inclusion and empower them to see their role within mission as valuable. This willingness to both hear and then consider implications for what is learned demonstrates the openness necessary to authentically live from Ignatian values demonstrated in the Examen. The challenge is for those in mission work to operate out of a place of freedom that recognizes the perspectives of religiously unaffiliated colleagues as good and holy as well.

Finally, the last strategy laid out here is that of recognizing the trajectory of one's commitment to mission; that is to say, the need for scaffolding, development, and growth that goes beyond contact with mission. Within this strategy is the need to make mission relevant. Chapter two's exploration of mission in Jesuit higher education demonstrated the relevance of mission to individuals, communities, and the wider context of culture and history unfolding beyond simply being the institution's mission. The communication of mission should reflect that relevance rather than being something stagnant. In the same way, some people will have short stints in Jesuit education while others will spend many years within a particular institution or within the network. Employees themselves are not stagnant and will connect to different parts of the mission in different ways at different times, including those who are religiously unaffiliated. Ranging from orientations that could be required for faculty or staff as introductory connection points to cohort-based seminars discussed earlier to reading groups that focus on a particular topic within Jesuit education to participating in the full Spiritual Exercises, mission formators should consider both the breadth and depth of what is offered for employees. While it is not

possible to have something curated specifically for each individual, developing a wide range of opportunities helps encourage lifelong learning and regular dedication to engaging with mission. Ideally, as an employee opts to participate in various formation offerings, a sense of empowerment and ownership will ensue. Scaffolding and range of offerings allows those with any identity to see participation in mission as a journey.

Additionally, empowering employees to see themselves as the mission and recognizing the possibility of why that helps enrich their professional life, as well as the lives of students, should be a key strategy as well. Recalling the theme of the third chapter and the importance of being able to contribute and have a role, finding ways to empower colleagues and help them see themselves as invaluable members of the community is key. This inclusion goes beyond asking employees to be consumers of mission formation opportunities, but to take ownership and leadership within the mission itself. In each of these areas, as mission formators rely on the highlighted strategies, there is opportunity to help include and celebrate colleagues that are religiously unaffiliated. As noted earlier, this includes representation and speaking roles in formation for others but can include additional strategies as well. For example, how do representatives of this population help inform what programs and resources scaffolding is being created in the first place? A mission team could include members of this community in advisory boards, focus groups, and other leadership programs as well. If an institution is serious about wanting this population to commit to animating the mission, it will ask that the institution be open to what that will look like, even if it is different than in the past. Supporting these initiatives will help this population feel trusted and seen in this work.

Importance of Belonging

While there is expectation and gift to the Jesuit institution when employees are committed to and integrating mission into their work, there can also be profound impact on the employees themselves. It is within this area of belonging that the reciprocal and participatory nature of the mission emerges most clearly. Being able to both receive gifts from and contribute to the mission helps deepen a sense of belonging and connection to the institution as much as the mission, despite when there are morale issues or tensions in the workplace. There are times that institutions have to make difficult decisions that some could view as being in opposition to caring for the whole person. For example, an institution might need to cut costs and change to a cheaper health insurance company that has less coverage for employees. This scenario demonstrates how there can be tension between *cura personalis* and *cura apostolica*. However, if an employee feels a sense of belonging in the workplace, there can be a greater openness to trying to understand how a decision like that could be made in addition to the frustration they are feeling.

Cultivating an authentic sense of belonging for employees could be what provides the extra support necessary to withstand budget cuts, a lack of salary increases, or navigating a difficult boss situation. As Xavier University's Vice President for Mission and Ministry wrote, in other words, *cura apostolica* flows from a culture in which everyone can say "I belong. I am valued. And I make a difference *every day*."[324] That feeling, closely tied to *cura personalis*, helps create a space where people feel seen, supported, and valued. If this is truly achieved, individuals will have a greater capacity to serve colleagues, students, and the institution itself while also receiving the internal

[324] Mooney, "Red Hots, Tic Tacs, and M&Ms," 21.

fortitude needed to navigate the ups and downs of a professional life. Each person gets to make a difference in a place of solidarity rather than simply giving and taking. That reciprocity is seen by leaning into the presupposition, of showing care for each individual, in approaching teaching as a learner, and so forth. A community where one can participate in but also receive from helps create a place with stronger morale and sense of belonging.

The additional benefit to working in a place that commits to learning and living its mission is the opportunity to have a shared vision for what the purpose of the endeavor is in the first place. As educator bel hooks wrote, "We must build community in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor. A community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us."[325] Jesuit higher education strives to be steeped in justice work and utilizes a shared language that reflects the nuance and depth of that striving. Currently, the shared language and vision stem from the Universal Apostolic Preferences. Fr. Michael Tunney, S.J. reflected,

> The UAPs articulate what the Jesuits are striving to be about and how lay people are invited to participate with the Jesuits. It's a fine articulation and it has caught fire with the best of our schools and people because it is completely understandable and thematically focused.[326]

Notice that while Tunney differentiates between Jesuits and lay people, there is no distinction between Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, or spiritual but not religious folks. Everyone is invited to this work. It should be noted that having a shared purpose and vision does not eliminate conflict or difference of opinion. There will continue to be disagreements and disappointments for those involved as people determine which approaches or interpretations of the mission should be among the top priorities. Having

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[325] hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 40.
[326] Tunney, S.J., Interview.

space to make critique is key for this type of community to thrive. As Rita Dollard-O'Malley shared, "Complaint and commitment go together. I don't complain unless I'm committed. When someone is complaining about how a university isn't living its mission, it means they are committed to that mission, whoever they are."[327] There should be disagreement, discussion, and dialogue as a way of being able to hear and recognize the various constituents within the institutions. But despite the difficult moments, those involved are committed.

This commitment to mission can help sustain employees in challenging times at work, but also within their personal lives. Fr. Paddy Gilger, S.J. is a sociology faculty member at Loyola University Chicago and writes about belonging within the Catholic Church. His research gleaned, "Purpose helps to resolve identity crises, is correlated with greater civic engagement, and aids in coping with mental distress."[328] Individual purpose helps, but a shared purpose, a collective purpose helps break people out of silos and back into meaningful connection and relationship with one another. While this exploration of belonging will support those who do have a religious tradition, religiously unaffiliated employees entirely fit within this structure as well. They can participate in caring for others, the work of justice, and academic excellence. As they are celebrated for how they already animate mission, they grow more committed to mission and have greater freedom to articulate who they are and the values they hold despite being outside of the dominant identity of the institution. This should be a goal of Jesuit colleges and universities; to create a space of belonging not only for students but also for employees. That type of

[327] Dollard-O'Malley, Interview.
[328] Paddy Gilger, S.J., "The Habits of Belonging," *Roots: Catholic Youth Evangelization in a Post-Pandemic World,* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), 48.

belonging should and will look different. Yet, the goal remains the same. In a space of belonging, employees will be more supported and available to serve the students and institution with more generosity and capacity.

Articulating key strategies and values for mission formation with religiously unaffiliated employees is necessary to bring intention and inclusion to this population. The strategies suggested reflect the themes and insights that emerged from the research of the previous three chapters. Creating a comprehensive way of proceeding with this demographic also represents best practices and approaches for working with employees with any religious identity. This comprehensive approach includes wisdom from each of the three areas of Jesuit mission. Taken from the spiritual tradition, an approach that is inclusive of religiously unaffiliated employees should center one's experience, encourage the incorporation of feelings and thoughts, and invite individuals to a place of silence and rest. From the justice tradition, mission formators are invited to consider the work of inclusion and equity for marginalized populations, introduce and articulate Catholic Social Teaching in accessible ways while being willing to listen to those that have been harmed by the Church, and to be active in the work of reconciliation and advocacy. Next, the academic pedagogy offered in Jesuit education invites mission formation offerings to lean into the relationality of the work, be open to change and growth, and consider how having a breadth and depth of programs can help communicate the relevance and ongoing nature of connection to mission. Each of these areas can contribute to a deeper sense of belonging for those involved, particularly those who are religiously unaffiliated.

Conclusion

Revisiting the core insights of the first three chapters allowed key themes of each chapter to emerge and inform a way of proceeding in mission work with religiously unaffiliated employees of Jesuit colleges and universities. Chapter two's themes included gifts of the three core areas of Jesuit mission: the gifts of the spiritual tradition, an approach to justice, and academic excellence/pedagogy. The third chapter elevated the wisdom and experiences of religiously unaffiliated individuals within Jesuit contexts that are committed to mission and finding unique ways of expressing that in ways that do not run against their personal values and beliefs. From this chapter, the themes of relationship, opportunity to contribute, and programs that help inform understanding surface for later strategies. The fourth chapter focused on those who do the work of mission formation both with attention on their invitations to the work as well as their perceptions and encounters of religiously unaffiliated colleagues. This chapter demonstrated the various roles and talents needed for people in these roles, contributed another example of the importance of relationships, and also did a brief exploration of the tension of Jesuit and Catholic.

The themes and findings of these chapters led to strategies and tactics that can be considered in developing a comprehensive strategy for mission formation, particularly when there is focus on religiously unaffiliated individuals. Ultimately, an approach for this population is best practice and will support and encourage people of any or no faith background. The first set of strategies comes from the spiritual tradition, including centering the experience and expertise of colleagues; inviting affective responses and

connections rather than only intellectual endeavors; and creating space for silence and rest. Secondly, a Jesuit Catholic approach to justice provides strategies, including a preferential option and consideration of those who are marginalized through a focus on representation, language, and presence; providing a clear articulation of the unique approach to social justice within this tradition; and being people who truly are people of justice and reconciliation. Finally, the pedagogy provides strategies of relationship-building, being open to change/growth, and developing a wide swath of programs for people at various stages of understanding and interest in relevant and interesting ways. By utilizing these strategies, those in mission formation can evaluate their current programs, look for ways to include new nuance, and deepen their support of mission formation for their colleagues.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

On November 2nd, 2023, Loyola University Chicago hosted a day of events celebrating its Ignatian heritage. One of the breakout sessions focused on hope as a tool for social change as well as a value deeply embedded in the Ignatian tradition. Faculty and staff from a variety of fields (public health, dance, philosophy, secondary education, and experiential education) discussed the role of hope in a Jesuit university from their respective areas. Sandra Kaufmann, Director of the Dance program, shared about a current student performance entitled, "Excavating Hope." This show brought to life her vision for the way performance can speak to both the grittiness of current reality, while still seeking, digging, and believing in hope. Her vision was informed by her life and by her own engagement with the mission and focus on hope of the school and the Society of Jesus. Through her vision, the students themselves access the mission as they bring to life the idea of excavating hope in the world. This image of excavation brings together the work of this thesis project. When one thinks of excavating, images arise of being in the messy reality of things, of looking for something buried and of value, and of the hope of finding something that can help connect people together. This metaphor brought to life the insights of this thesis project. Of course, the work of mission integration in a Jesuit college or university can be explicit and formal. Yet, the idea of excavating, of culling the community in an effort to find new treasured ways of articulating and bringing to life the mission of an institution elicits a different energy. The work can be messy and gritty, but that unknown and exploration is part of the treasure. The research of this project

demonstrates the great gift and importance of employees who are committed to living the mission, regardless of what their personal religious identity is or is not.

What Did This Project Do?

The previous chapter summarized the key themes and takeaways from the research and evaluation of this project. Each area of the research contributed to a way of proceeding for those engaging in mission formation work. By operating out of three components of Jesuit mission, namely the gifts of the spiritual tradition, a specific approach to justice rooted in faith, and academic excellence/pedagogy, mission formators can help translate and articulate access points for those desiring to connect to this mission. These components also create a framework for identifying ways that others are living this mission, or otherwise stated, serve as the tools of the excavation process, with the purpose of telling the stories of what mission is already being expressed. Hearing from those who are religiously unaffiliated in Jesuit higher education brought to light the importance of relationship, opportunity to contribute, and having meaningful programs that invite, orient, and deepen one's engagement with the mission. Finally, the research shifted to those responsible for mission integration work, including their own origin stories and motivations, as well as acknowledging their perceptions of working with this population. The fruit of this work is an invitation to respect and support those who hold different spiritual or religious understandings while maintaining one's own beliefs and convictions. As Ed Foley named this, "Having the capacity to befriend another's spiritual tradition with gratitude and respect while maintaining integrity around your own form of believing is an art that requires intelligence, skill, and authenticity."[329] Holding both

[329] Foley, *Theological Reflection Across Religious Traditions: The Turn to Reflective Believing,* 57.

respect for another and one's own integrity does require effort and intentionality, which hopefully has been demonstrated throughout this project.

Why this Topic?

The research shared in this project came from a variety of motivations, including the shifting nature of Jesuit higher education in the United States, a desire to contribute to my own field, and the belief that serving this population specifically will directly contribute to a richer approach to mission formation for employees with any background. The first point stems from the belief that Jesuit higher education has something unique and relevant to offer to 21st century realities and culture. When a school identifies as Jesuit, the institution has unique characteristics and qualities that differentiate it from public schools and differently affiliated private schools. Given the landscape of U.S. higher education, private and liberal art schools are and will continue to compete over enrollment numbers as the "demographic cliff" approaches due to the rapidly declining number of traditionally aged college students available for recruitment.[330] Developing ways of affirming and deepening the Jesuit mission will aid in standing out among the other liberal arts institutions.

Secondly, this project hopes to contribute to the work of Jesuit colleges and universities, as well as a broader context. Mission formation practitioners includes Vice Presidents, Mission Officers, and other positions focused on the development of employees. While all employees are responsible for building connections and committing themselves to the mission, the institution itself must demonstrate and articulate what this

[330] Ray Schroeder, "A Second Demographic Cliff Adds to Urgency of Change," *Inside Higher Ed*, May 18, 2021, https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/online-trending-now/second-demographic-cliff-adds-urgency-change.

means in authentic and nuanced ways for a diverse group of employees. A meaningful engagement of this mission can contribute to retention, commitment, and belonging for the employees themselves. Beyond Jesuit higher education, these insights translate into secondary education and other Jesuit apostolates. The circumstances of religiously unaffiliated employees is not limited to the Jesuits, but also other endeavors and ministries of orders within the Church and wider Christian community, including other schools, hospitals, social service organizations, media companies, and so forth.[331] Rather than focusing on evangelization for unaffiliated employees, these institutions can benefit all involved by directly articulating their values that are accessible and common among a diverse community. These shared values invite richer and more meaningful contributions from those outside the dominant religious identity of the institution.

Finally, this project establishes that best practices for religiously unaffiliated individuals actually identifies best practices for doing mission work for anyone. When the focus of a project is on a particular audience, there is need for greater specificity, nuance, and intentionality. Each of these components contributes to a deeper and more accessible approach to mission formation for folks with any background. Being transparent about the inclusion of this community within this work can translate to a value of creating places of belonging for folks of other marginalized identities as well. If the hope of Jesuit education is for all of its community members, including students,

[331] On January 12, 2024, I presented this research at the "Lighting the Way Forward: The Purpose of Catholic Higher Education in a Changing World" at the University of San Diego. Conference participants came from many geographic locations and roles. The group included a cardinal, priests and deacons, those working in both higher education and secondary education, university faculty and administrators, staff from a wide range of departments and areas, and so forth. As an anecdote to demonstrate the relevance of this topic, there was standing room only for this presentation with a myriad of individuals approaching asking to read this thesis project, share gratitude the topic is being discussed, and point out how necessary it is that this work is done.

staff, faculty, and administrators, to engage with the depth of the institution's mission, those seen as leaders in the work should model and demonstrate the opportunity for that inclusiveness for individuals from any background. These practices also create space for those who are religious as well, including those who are Catholic. Creating an inclusive and intentional approach to mission serves everyone.

Continued Areas of Research

While this project focused on religiously unaffiliated employees committed to mission in Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, a great many areas for research are outstanding. To begin, the same approach to research could have focused on non-Catholic Christians, on anyone in a non-Christian Abrahamic tradition, on Indigenous spiritualities, or on Eastern traditions. This research will likely find similarities but also uncover particularities that could enhance an approach of mission formation for employees of all backgrounds. Another area for exploration would be to do meaningful engagement with those who are antagonistic to the mission of an institution. This population will likely include some who are religiously unaffiliated, as well as those from faith traditions. Engaging in this research would hold its own challenges, including finding people willing to speak about this topic from this population. It would require deep listening and capacity to receive and hold anger and frustration from those antagonistic to the mission. Differentiating between those who are religiously unaffiliated from those who actively dismiss the mission is necessary and important for this project, as well as others.

Another area for further research is looking at how mission is expressed and promulgated in a new era of Jesuit higher education that centers lay presidents. In many

ways, this shift was the impetus for Mission Officers, Vice Presidents for Mission, and developing roles that are faculty and staff facing rather than Campus Ministry. The understanding of mission and possibly a sense of requirement or urgency around these topics will look differently without a priest at the helm. With this reality only beginning 22 years ago, the resulting changes are becoming increasingly more relevant. In the area of mission formation for employees, another area for research would be looking at burnout for those in these positions. While many of these positions are semi-new, determining appropriate job descriptions, boundaries, and expectations will contribute to individuals in these roles being able to sustain the work. Finally, an area of research related to this would be continued dialogue and honing of language around the tension of being an institution that is Catholic and Jesuit. The research could explicitly focus on ways of mitigating, holding, and responding to the tension.

Given that the shift to lay leadership is not unique to Jesuit higher education but also present within other Catholic ministries and apostolates, further research is necessary for the religiously unaffiliated employees of these other spaces. The various organizations, including Jesuit secondary education, other Catholic charisms sponsoring schools, hospitals, and other social services will proceed into the future with diverse staff and contributors. Listening to those that are already working in these contexts without a religious identity can help identify what the key access points and opportunities are that are specific to each context.

A final area of continued research would be to explore how the shifting nature of the Catholic Church impacts an understanding of mission in Jesuit higher education. This could mean research outside the United States more globally. This could also focus on

the shifting demographics of the Catholic Church, including the increasing number of Hispanic Catholics in the United States. Will this increase of Catholics translate to larger populations of either students or employees in Jesuit higher education? If so, how does this impact an approach to mission integration for employees in this context? The place of higher education in the United States is also currently shifting for a wide range of reasons. As higher education in general and Jesuit higher education in particular navigate different realities, the work of mission integration will also shift and adapt. All of these topics are ripe for research.

Onward

So now what? From the beginning, the hope of this project was to contribute to the strategy of supporting and honoring both the mission of Jesuit higher education and those individuals that contribute to the mission from a religiously unaffiliated background. Upon the conclusion of this project, the hope shifts to include the initial idea, but also that if religiously unaffiliated individuals read this, they will see themselves represented and acknowledged for the ways they expand Jesuit institutions of higher education capacity for living its mission. The hope now includes that if those doing the work of mission formation read this, they might feel affirmed in their role and encouraged in how to proceed. The final hope is that those affiliated with the work of Jesuit higher education might have the courage to seek out the mission and respond accordingly. As the poet and activist Amanda Gorman proclaimed at the 2020 presidential inauguration, “There is always light. If only we’re brave enough to see it. If

only we're brave enough to be it."[332] There is always hope and mission in Jesuit institutions as long as there are those willing to excavate and acknowledge. There is always hope and mission in Jesuit institutions as long as there are those willing to embody and be the mission. May this educational endeavor continue to transform the lives of students and employees as they strive to set the world on fire in love and justice.

[332] Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb," (poem, Presidential Inauguration, Washington, D.C., January 20th, 2020).

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