Unit 15: Lay Ignatian Spirituality
INTRODUCTION
Origins and Dynamics of Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian Spirituality was born of a 'searching soul', as you have read in the earlier modules. Recovering from his leg injury, Ignatius gradually became attuned to the spirit within. Slowly but surely, through difficulty and great discomfort he began to find a unity with God, a transcendent gratitude for life and an urgent desire to put himself at the service of the greatest good.

At a time of great social change and upheaval in the Church - times much like our own - , when the Institution of the Church was imposing the Inquisition rather than encouraging personal discernment – you find the lay man Ignatius, not a learned theologian or a Doctor of the Church, offering a life - line to the ordinary Christian. He proposed that we should look within our hearts, listen to the prompting of the Spirit, and trust what brings us joy. His rigorous self-examination and reflection on both positive and painful experiences offered a means of growth. He encouraged the nurturing of a very personal relationship with God, based on the individual’s unique biography and condition. He opened a window on the light of Christ, the faithful love of God and our part in God’s plan. He was led slowly, drawing on great reserves of character and self discipline, gradually freeing the spirit from unnecessary clutter or attachments to a vision of life with God that offered true freedom of spirit. While he found his way slowly, he recorded the learning experience and had the insight to realise that this very personal experience of God was not unique to himself, but could be a methodology to be shared with others. Ignatian Spirituality offers signposts that all can follow, it can be applied universally – and yet the journey remains unique and personal. What is interesting about Ignatius’ approach is that it has remained relevant over time and across cultural divides, and flourishes more than ever in our own times.

The Search for Meaning Today

Through Baptism we are called to unity in Christ. As part of the Christian community we have the opportunity through liturgy and the sacraments to strengthen our relationship with Christ. Our life’s purpose as Christians used be summed up as the journey to ‘know, love and serve God in this life so that we can be happy with him in heaven....’ However, for many today the question is, How do we find meaning, relevance
or nourishment to give us strength and purpose today? Is it possible for the individual to develop a personal and a mature relationship with God that is coherent with the reality of life in the twenty first century? Why is Ignatian (or any!) Spirituality of use to us?

Earthly yet Heroic

Ignatius’ spirituality is attractive because it was crafted in ordinary human situations: his sickness, loss of employment, uncertainty about the future, family obligations, family opposition, poverty, failing and succeeding in studies, living in many foreign places as an outsider, scruples, pilgrimage with all its mundane and momentous choices, the desire to help people but uncertainty how to do so, ecclesiastical opposition and suspicion, being accused of suspect motives etc, etc.

While it is reassuring that Ignatian Spirituality is rooted in real life experience, both positive and challenging, it attracts a wide following because it also gives space to encourage the ‘heroic’ in everyday life. For example, in Jesuit schools and universities students encounter and are inspired by some of the following ideals – being persons for others; being challenged to have a Faith that seeks Justice; finding God in all things; seeking excellence; reflecting and learning from experience, developing a heightened sense of purpose; AMDG – doing things for the Greater Glory of God.

At a time when the international community asks about what values and morality will sustain society into the future, the ideals contained in the examples above have stood the test of time and have given strength and purpose to many Christians lives in all sorts of circumstances. This is what is on offer here.

For the People of God

A point to keep in mind in this Unit is that Ignatius was forty nine by the time the Society of Jesus was formed; he had been developing his spirituality from 1521 to 1540, and had been ordained only in 1537. So his is a lay spirituality from the start: it became the spirituality of a clerical and religious group only after 1540 when the Jesuit Order was founded and Ignatius wrote its Constitutions. However, from the time of his arrival in Paris Ignatius lived a highly focussed life of dedication with companions, certain that he was not called to monastic life, but uncertain then as to what exactly he was called to!
Had the foundation of the Society of Jesus been forbidden in 1540, Ignatius and his companions would have lived out their spirituality as secular priests and shared it with lay people. While we are looking specifically at Ignatian Spirituality in relation to lay people in this module it is worth mentioning that as well as founding the Society of Jesus Ignatius inspired many other religious, both individuals and congregations who followed his approach, e.g. The Loreto Sisters.

**A Relational Spirituality**

In Unit Two we looked at the dynamics of Ignatian spirituality - the relationship between God, God’s world and yourself, who and wherever you may be. The living out of these relationships does not require dependence on any religious group. We may presume that during the suppression of the Jesuits, 1773-1814, lay persons who had been living out of Ignatian spirituality continued as before. Nonetheless it is true that the Society of Jesus has shepherded Ignatian spirituality more or less faithfully over the centuries, and that it continues to enrich it. But the number of lay persons, female and male, who have access to the sources, is increasing dramatically in our time: they are appropriating the heritage that is rightly theirs, and adapting it to their emerging situations. Jesuits and lay persons are now collaborating and learning from one another 'how to proceed in an Ignatian way' i.e., how to live out their spirituality in changing times.

**B. UNIT CONTENT**

**Ignatian Associations:** Many lay persons make full use of Ignatian spirituality: they pray in Ignatian fashion, practise the Exam, engage in personal, corporate and social discernment, try to find God in their daily lives, make the Exercises in Daily Life etc. Through conferences, retreats, reading, workshops, spiritual direction, etc, they develop their understanding of Ignatian spirituality and apply it within their life situations.

Vast numbers of persons do this individually. There are also groups who support one another by praying and reflecting together on a regular basis. Some groups undertake a common apostolic work, such as caring for refugees, or engaging corporately in issues of justice. GC35 notes the increasing number of associations inspired by Ignatian spirituality (Decree 6: 27). These include Alumni Groups (graduate groups from Jesuit schools / universities), Volunteer Organisations, the Apostleship of Prayer, and the Eucharistic Youth Movement etc.
Christian Life Communities
The best known of these groups who live out of Ignatian spirituality together are the International group known as the Christian Life Communities (CLC).
The Jesuit General Congregation 35 (GC 35), in Decree 6 (one of the summary writings from the Congregation) notes: ‘The CLC has roots that are deep in the charism and history of the Society. We wish to support CLC in its journey towards ever greater apostolic effectiveness and collaboration with the Society... (Jesuit) Superiors are encouraged to seek ways to support and accompany CLC and other Ignatian inspired autonomous associations’ (n.28, 29).
CLC is centrally organised and has a global outreach in some sixty countries. It has its origins in the World Federation of Marian Congregations founded in 1563, and it adopted its current name in 1967.
The CLC holds a regular international Assembly. Its formation of members is based on the experience of the Exercises and of Ignatian spirituality. While structurally independent of the Society of Jesus, it engages Jesuits as ‘ecclesiastical assistants’ to provide support through conferences, retreats, workshops, spiritual direction, etc. For further information. If you feel an urge to get involved with an existing group or set up a new one, contact any Jesuit house, or consult the CLC websites (http://www.clc-ireland.com/), and you will be encouraged and assisted!

SOURCES OF NOURISHMENT
Websites: There are some 800 Jesuit websites! The current project of Ignatian Spirituality Online with which you are now engaging helps to fill the need for a systematic presentation of Ignatian spirituality. It offers up-to-date sources of nourishment for lay persons in Ireland and across the globe. Consult the Table of Contents for the topic you seek, whether it be an overview of Ignatian spirituality; the Examen or Review of Consciousness; Ignatian Prayer; Personal, Corporate and Social discernment, Finding God in All Things, etc.
The following websites are a sample of Jesuit websites worldwide:-

- http://www.jesuit.org.uk : The Jesuits in Britain
- http://www.sjweb.info : A website of the Jesuit Curia in Rome
- http://www.jesuit.ie : A website of the Jesuits in Ireland
- http://www.creighton.edu/ministry : The Ministry Division of Creighton University, Omaha, USA

On a daily basis are Sacred Space from the Irish Jesuit website which is ‘screen based’ and ‘Pray as you go’ from the British Province which uses pod casts;
During the seasons of Lent and Advent many of the Jesuit sites internationally offer specific material which you can follow in preparation for Easter and Christmas.

**Reading:** The lists of recommended readings given in these Units provide accessible materials on some 45 areas of Ignatian interest.

**Direction & Training:** Jesuit Centres of Spirituality in different countries offer formation in spiritual direction, prayer guidance, seminars, training courses, summer schools, weekends etc. These Centres are delighted to welcome persons who have fallen in love with Ignatian spirituality and wish to become multipliers of it. Consult the web for information about the Centre closest to you.

**Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life:** Jesuit Centres and individual Jesuits offer the Exercises in Daily Life.

While there are many ways of encountering Ignatian spirituality – perhaps indirectly by watching the process of Jesuit education, by attending talks, reading or attending days of reflection, there is no substitute for doing the Spiritual Exercises as set out by Ignatius. This gives you an experience of Ignatian Spirituality in a very direct and often life-changing way.

You know that the full Exercises in their intensive form take about thirty days and are made in silence and seclusion in a Retreat Centre with a personal guide. But those who make the Exercises in Daily Life remain in their ordinary places of life and work, meet their guide on a weekly basis, pray daily, and usually complete the Exercises in a number of months – depending on the person's availability, usually over a period of six to nine months or longer, as best suits the person making them.

This form of making the Exercises is very attractive to lay people: as it is possible to integrate ordinary life experiences with the dynamic of the Exercises. If timing allows you can synchronise the Exercises with the liturgical year: this offers a particularly enriched experience. If you are considering making the Exercises it is worth taking advice as to whether the timing and your immediate circumstances would suit this level of commitment.

**REFLECTION**

Spend some time reflecting prayerfully on where you feel drawn for further nourishment in Ignatian spirituality.
C. RECOMMENDED READING

There are many introductions to Ignatian Spirituality, and they are intended for lay persons. For example:


D. LINKS

Already given in section B

E. INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

An awareness of how the Exercises are highly suited for lay persons
Knowledge of the sources of Ignatian Spirituality that are available to you

F. ASSIGNMENT

Write a page on your personal history in regard to Ignatian spirituality. What have been the highlights thus far, and what might be beckoning?