

Practicing Ignatian Conversations

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

A VIDEO SERIES TO LIGHT YOUR PATH

JESUITS

Definition

One of St. Ignatius Loyola's great spiritual insights, and therefore one of his gifts to our world, was a way of engaging in conversation with another person. For St. Ignatius, the other person is a child of God and a person deserving respect and consideration no matter what opinion the person holds or the history of the relationship with this person. We call this Ignatian Conversation.

At the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius lays out the "Presupposition" for the entire retreat and for Ignatian Conversations. In it each person "presupposes" the good in the other and the "goodness" of the statement being made. When one believes the statement is not correct, with love one seeks to correct or work to understand the statement so that "it may be saved" or understood in a correct fashion.

If anything, An Ignatian Year heightens our awareness of the life of St. Ignatius and his way of proceeding, so that we may grow closer to one another in relationship and come to know God loves us all unconditionally. Practicing Ignatian Conversations is a practical way of growing closer to one another in relationship.

As students and teachers at Jesuit schools worldwide, we strive to engage in honest, brave, and fruitful conversations which have the following attributes & indicators. Perhaps at this time in our world, these conversations are even more important.

Frameworks and Attributes

Slow to speak. Enter gently into the situation and conversation, allowing everyone the opportunity to speak. During the time, talk less and listen more. As you and your partners prepare to engage in meaningful conversation, do a quick self-check:

- Reflect on your position, when entering into a situation or when asked about a conversation prompt.
- Approaching the situation and conversation, assess the context, your attention to presupposition of good, and other people involved.
- Be mindful of the space and surroundings.
- Be mindful of how you are perceived by others – are you open, smiling, joyful? Are you curious? How do you show how you feel?
- Be mindful of your physical appearance – are you sitting, in a physical position that lets others know you are open? Are you in a physical position of openness? Arms and legs not crossed? Leaning into the conversation?
- Be calm and open in your demeanor. What does that look like for you as you approach the situation?
- Think about your best attributes. What do you look like and act like when you are at your best? Carry your best into the situation.

Listen attentively. In lieu of waiting to speak, listen with an ear toward understanding others' views. While listening, be silent and don't interrupt. Perhaps it's possible to put yourself in the other person's shoes? And by doing so, come to understand. As you and your partners prepare to engage in meaningful conversation, do a quick self-check:

- How are you preparing to listen? Take a few deep breaths.



Artwork by Ignasi Flores

- Pay attention to the position of your body. Face the speaker openly.
- Maintain eye contact and look at the speaker during the conversation.
- Put aside distracting thoughts or environmental pieces – this is tough when other things are happening around you. Stay focused.
- Be attentive to the speaker’s body language.

Seek the truth in what others are saying. Not every situation is one that requires debate. During the situation and conversation, commit to the spirit of a “learner” who is curious and wonders. Perhaps only comment to share information, not persuade. As you and your partners engage in meaningful conversation, keep in mind:

- How do I approach the situation as a believer, not a doubter?
- Be active in listening. To do that, as you listen, pretend that is your assignment to report out what the speaker(s) is saying or has said to a larger group.
- Use paraphrasing, clarifying, and summarizing statements, when responding.
 - “You are saying. . .” - paraphrasing
 - “It sounds like you are saying . . .” – paraphrasing
 - “Can you give an example of that?” – clarifying
 - “You just said that such and such is important, can you help me understand what that means to you?” – clarifying
 - “The main ideas are . . .” – summarizing

Disagree humbly, respectfully, and thoughtfully. When you are in a situation or conversation during which there may be disagreement, avoid blame, speculations, assumptions, and generalizations. Begin to develop and practice language and habits that promote healthy disagreement. As you and your partners disagree, practice using the following language:

- “I see what you are saying, and...”
- “I understand where you are coming from, and...”
- “That’s a valid point, and...”
- “I respect you, but we disagree...”

Allow the time it needs. Not every situation or conversation is an end. Perhaps the situation or conversation is a start to something larger. Seek opportunities to continue the dialogue and follow-up when necessary. As the conversation comes to a close, consider ways in which it can continue at a future time:



- “Thanks for this conversation. I appreciate you sharing with me. What’s next?”
- “As we continue to think about these things, what are some next steps we can take, in terms of action?”
- “This seems to be the start to a larger conversation. Thank you. What’s next?”
- “Can we continue this conversation and if so, when can we talk next?”
- “Hey, how did we do here today?”