Jesuit — A member of the Society of Jesus, a religious order founded by Ignatius of Loyola and his first companions in 1540.

Magis (Latin for “more”) — A term traditionally used by Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits expressing God’s continuous call to each person to make decisions of “greater love.”

Manresa — A town in northeastern Spain where in 1522-23 a thirty-year-old layman named Ignatius of Loyola had the powerful spiritual experiences that led to his famous “Spiritual Exercises”, which later guided the founding and the pedagogy of Jesuit schools and all Jesuit ministries. Ignatius lived in Manresa, just north of Barcelona and near the famous Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, for eleven months.

The Society of Jesus — A Catholic religious order of men founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola and a small group of his multinational companions, all fellow students from the University of Paris. They saw their mission as one of being available to go anywhere and do anything to “help souls,” especially where the need was greatest (e.g., where a certain people or a certain kind of work were neglected). Today, numbering about 18,000 priests and brothers, they are spread out in almost every country of the world. The abbreviation “S.J.” after a person’s name means that he is a member of the Society of Jesus.

Spiritual Guidance/Direction — People are often helped to integrate their faith and their life by talking on a regular basis (e.g., monthly) with someone they can trust. This person acts as a guide (sometimes also called a spiritual friend, companion, or director) for the journey, helping them to find God’s presence and call in the people and circumstances of their everyday lives.

The assumption is that God is already present there, and that another person, a guide, can help them to notice God’s presence and also how God is guiding them in their decisions. The guide is often a specially trained listener skilled in discernment and therefore able to help others sort out the various spiritual influences within and around them. While he or she may suggest various styles of praying, the focus is much broader than that; spiritual direction and guidance looks upon the whole of a person’s life experience as the place to meet God.
What is Ignatian Spirituality?

The term “spirituality” describes the outward and inward expression of one’s faith in God. In Christian history, spirituality is ultimately a way of living and acting in relationship with Jesus. The First letter of John describes the essence of Christian spirituality: “The one who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same manner as He walked.” (1 John 2.6) Although it includes prayer and attention to one’s interior life, Christian spirituality is a way of living and acting in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus. Christian spirituality does not exist as just a single expression, but many forms of Christian spiritualities have developed over the centuries, even emerging during the first century of the early Church. For example, each of the four Gospels in the New Testament can be said to reflect a distinct spirituality, each faithful to the Good News Jesus preached yet viewed through the distinct cultural experiences of its writer. As Christianity developed, however, so too did other spiritualities, each rooted in a particular historical and cultural setting. Each was grounded in a specific understanding about God and about God’s relationship with the world and each human person in that world.

A spirituality is not simply a collection of spiritual ideals and practices from which one can pick and choose as a buffet. Each spirituality possesses an internal cohesion with its elements displaying a remarkable interrelatedness. Every spirituality is identified by the specific historical, cultural, or religious tradition from which it sprang – 17th century French, Pauline, Carmelite, Celtic, and Methodist spiritualities, to name but a few. The Jesuit Retreat Center focuses on Ignatian spirituality, based upon the religious experience of the 16th-century Basque, St. Ignatius of Loyola. This brief description will highlight some of the more important traits of this spirituality, describe each trait, underscore their interrelatedness, and attempt to show how each flows from, and gives expression to, Ignatius’ integral worldview. In order to do this, however, it seems best to begin not with the spirituality of St. Ignatius, but with the man himself.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

In 1521 after a battle defending Pamplona in northern Spain, Ignatius of Loyola, a Basque courtier-soldier lay on his sickbed recovering from wounds from a cannonball that had gravely threatened his life. Looking for something to help pass the time, he began to read: not the romantic novels he desired, but the only books available – a life of Christ and the lives of the saints. From time to time, he set aside his book and allowed his thoughts to wander – imagining himself was not just due to you or to another. How has God ministered to you and guided you in those blessed moments?

- Once again, use your memory to review the time frame since the last Examen, but this time ask God to surface moments that need completeness, reconciliation, healing, or attention in any way. Notice feelings of conflict, uncertainty, unclarity, pain, or other jarring feelings that God may surface. And as these feelings surface, ask God to give you insight into the cause of these feelings — and also ask for freedom to accept whatever God wishes to reveal to you — whether you are the cause of these feelings, if another person is the cause, or whether a memory needs completeness, healing, or attention.

- Finally, and more importantly, pray directly and personally to God in words and feelings of your choice in what Ignatius calls a “colloquy” — i.e. an intimate conversation “as friend with friend”. Express whatever comes to mind or emerges from your heart. Perhaps you may pray to deepen, maximize, or share the blessings you have received — or pray for strategies to complete, heal, or reconcile those memories that need attention. In whatever direction you are drawn, pray from your heart directly to God. Renew your commitment to follow the path that God offers you to be a source of light for all creation, and a co-worker with Jesus in His vineyard.

GLOSSARY

Finding God in All Things — A phrase that not only invites us to wonder at, and be grateful for, the gifts of creation, but more specifically to be attentive to how God is laboring for us in all circumstances, encounters, and decisions, always encouraging us to make choices that witness to faith and love. God certainly does not desire events that are painful or sinful, yet even despite sin and pain, God is working and guiding us to make decisions for reconciliation, love, and faith. At the end of his dictated Autobiography, Ignatius states that “every time and hour he wanted to find God, he found him.” This grace to be sensitive to God’s presence and laboring on our behalf is the fruit of ongoing reflection and discernment, principally through the Ignatian Examen of Consciousness.
returning to a career in diplomacy as a civil servant. His thoughts also
turned to what he had read, and he imagined himself imitating the
heroic deeds of the saints in serving God.

He began to notice, however, that his thoughts evoked different
reactions within him. Thoughts of himself as a courtier or diplomat,
though delightful while they lasted, ultimately left him feeling empty
and sad. On the other hand, thoughts of imitating the heroic deeds
of the saints brought him a joy that lasted even after these thoughts
had ended. Then, as he later described it, ‘one day his eyes opened a
little, and he began to wonder at this difference and reflect upon it.

It dawned on him that one set of thoughts was directed toward God
and presumably had its origin in God, whereas the other was not.
Two contrary forces or spirits, he sensed, were actively at work in
him: the Spirit of God and the spirit of evil. He realized that God was
communicating not in mountaintop experiences, but in his affective
responses to the ordinary events of his life.

During the long months of his recuperation, Ignatius read and re-read
the two books, reflected on Jesus’ life and the examples of the saints,
and made more than a few resolutions. What was ultimately pivotal,
however, was not anything that he did during this time, but rather
something that was happening to him. God, he realized, was actively
at work in him – inviting, directing, guiding, and actively disposing
him for the way in which he might best serve him.

The Ignatian Examen is customarily done at the end of each day,
although this prayer may be done more frequently as the person
feels drawn to it. The more frequently one does it however, this
prayer method becomes more natural. Thus the Ignatian Examen
fosters a way of consciousness, a way of growing into an ever-closer
relationship with God by becoming more aware of how God is active
in one’s life. The Ignatian Examen can take anywhere between five
and fifteen minutes. It really doesn’t matter how long one spends in
this prayer; the important thing is that he opens oneself to recognizing
and responding to God’s movements within the person’s life. Since
God does the work and is the initiator of what surfaces in this prayer,
the location and time for making the Ignatian Examen are highly
flexible, even prayed during the quiet moments while one is walking
or driving.

St. Ignatius suggests five steps to the Ignatian Examen of
Consciousness. It is important, however, that the person feels free
to structure the Examination in a way that is most helpful. There is
no right way to do it; nor is there a need to go through all of the five
points each time. A person might, for instance, find oneself spending
the entire time on only one or two points. The basic rule is: Go
wherever God draws you. And this touches upon an important point:
the Ignatian Examen of Consciousness is primarily a time of prayer; it
is a ‘being with God.’ Many forms of the Ignatian Examen have been
developed and used fruitfully over the ages. The five points which
follow comprise one style of the Examen, based upon the discernment
of spirits.

• Recall that you are in the presence of God: You are before God
who loves you and welcomes you, who enlightens and guides you.
Embrace the God who dwells in you, the God ever at work in you.
Pray to the Spirit of God for enlightenment, trust, and freedom to
receive whatever God surfaces in your memory and whatever God
wishes to teach you.

• Recall your day or whatever length of time since your last Examen.
Without a chronological or systematic review, ask God to surface
the blessings that you have recently experienced. These blessings
may be significant, or they may be as simple as a smile, a letter, a
bit of quiet time, or a kind word. Considering the hundred of ways
one has been blessed since the last Examen — physically, socially,
emotionally, etc. — which ones does God desire you to notice? As
they surface, give thanks to God for the gifts received.

• As moments of blessings surface, how has God worked for you
and been present to you during those moments? Perhaps you
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him for the way in which he might best serve him.

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

All forms of Christian spirituality possess an internal cohesion, and
this is certainly true for Ignatian spirituality. But we might well ask
ourselves: Just what is the nature of this internal cohesion? What is
the glue or, more precisely, the understanding or interior vision that
gives Ignatian spirituality its cohesion? Although Ignatius never spoke
in such terms, his realization at Loyola that God was actively at work
in his life and, as his experience subsequently revealed, that God was

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and been present to you during those moments? Perhaps you
experienced an expression of kindness, generosity, or insight that
similarly at work in the lives of all people provided the grounding for what became his spirituality. This insight became the foundational premise underlying his *Spiritual Exercises* as expressed in the introductory notes to this great work: ‘It is the nature of the Creator to deal directly with the creature, embracing it with love and praise, and disposing it for how it might serve him.’ This understanding of God – that God is an ‘active God,’ ever at work in people’s lives, inviting, directing, guiding, and disposing them for making decisions out of a disposition for greater love and also for how they might serve as a collaborator with Jesus in the mission of his vineyard – animates Ignatian spirituality and gives it its internal cohesion.

Although Ignatian spirituality includes many forms of prayer, discernment, and apostolic service, it is the interior dispositions of attentiveness and responsiveness that are ultimately crucial. Ignatian spirituality calls each person to give remarkable attention to the present moment — to the activity of God and to the person’s responsiveness to what God is asking of the person now.

**The Spiritual Exercises**

Ignatian spirituality began in the religious experience of Ignatius Loyola, but it only took shape and form as he gave it written expression in his *Spiritual Exercises*. This spiritual classic owes its origin to Ignatius’ reflections on how God had been at work in his own life and his experiences of guiding others in the spiritual life. It is not a treatise on the spiritual life nor, for that matter, is it even meant to be read. It is a set of guidelines, somewhat like a teacher’s notes, intended for a person guiding another in ‘making’ the Exercises. *The Spiritual Exercises* describes a process directed toward developing attentiveness to God, openness to God and ultimately responsiveness to God. All this is based on the premises (1) that God deals directly with the individual person and (2) that the person can understand or discern to what God is inviting him or her.

Within *The Spiritual Exercises*, various styles of prayer and also methods of decision-making are introduced in a systematic fashion. Ignatius presents a variety of possibilities for encountering God—hence the plural “exercises”. God leads each person uniquely through these themes, which are organized with the life of Jesus as its focal point. A more detailed explanation of the scope and sequence of *The Spiritual Exercises* — and related articles — can be found on the Jesuit Retreat Center webpage on “retreats”. Since they are so integral to the work of the Jesuit Retreat Center, we wish to highlight two central gifts of *The Spiritual Exercises*: discernment and the Ignatian Examen of Consciousness.

**Discernment**

Discernment is rooted in the understanding that God is ever at work in our lives – inviting, directing, guiding, and drawing us into the fullness of life. Its central action is reflection on the ordinary events of our lives. It seeks to discover God’s presence in these moments and to follow the direction and guidance God gives us through grace. It is not the events themselves that are of interest, but rather the affective responses they evoke in us – feelings of joy, sorrow, peace, anxiety and all the indefinable ‘somethings’ that arise and stir within us. It is precisely here that through faith we can discover God’s direction and guidance in our lives.

Discernment presupposes an ability to reflect on the ordinary events of one’s life, a habit of personal prayer, self-knowledge, knowledge of one’s deepest desires, and openness to God’s direction and guidance. Discernment is a prayerful ‘pondering’ or ‘mulling over’ the choices a person wishes to consider through which we encounter God’s guidance and influence in our decision-making processes. Again, this is not to say that God is found in all decisions, such as choosing between soup and salad, or in selecting answer “a” on a multiple choice test, for these choices are “neutral” with respect to faith and love. But if any choice directly or indirectly involves an increase of love, then God will be involved in that decision, influencing us to choose the direction which brings greater faith, hope, and love, the movement which Ignatius terms “consolation”. Even if the person is not aware of the presence and activity of God, the care and work of God continues to be a part of every person’s life. Thus discernment is a convergence of many factors concerning attention to thoughts, feelings, impulses, desires, and other affective responses, all of which need to be weighed and evaluated in prayer. The process of discernment helps us to discover the guidance and activity of God in our lives through the invitation to make choices of deeper love and faith.

**Examination of Consciousness**

The Ignatian Examen of Consciousness is a simple form of prayer directed toward developing a spiritual sensitivity to the unique ways God approaches, invites, calls, and interacts with each person. The Ignatian Examen of Consciousness differs from the “examination of conscience” which is a preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Ignatian Examen is more expansive than the “examination of conscience” since the Examen recalls to one’s memory how God is active in all aspects of daily life — not just in one’s struggles and the response to sinfulness. The Ignatian Examen is essentially the result of God’s initiative, surfacing the experiences, encounters, and moments that God desires us to notice.