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A LAY FOUNDATION, A SHARED ENTERPRISE

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In reflecting on the report, I am struck by both the distinctive gifts of the variety of individual programs mentioned, and by a sense that there is much that is common, in both the challenges and the graces experienced world-wide in this ministry of the Spiritual Exercises. The kinds of challenges being faced in the giving of Annotations 18 and 19 Exercises, in the on-going formation of guides and directors, and in collaborative ministry or partnership are similar, and are indications of just how much growth has taken place.

Ignatian spirituality centres initiated by laity are not mentioned in the report. This was the case in South Africa where two other laywomen and I approached the Society of Jesus with the idea of starting such a project as a collaborative venture. The Society was open to the idea and generously agreed to provide the necessary funding. The small number of Jesuits in the region and the many different apostolates in which they are involved has meant that it has not been possible to date to have a Jesuit full-time on the team. The core team is made up entirely of laity who are well-trained in ignatian spirituality and has the support and expertise of a Jesuit who acts as a consultant to the team and who gives guest lectures in theology as part of the centre's programme to train spiritual directors.

The report (para. 11) notes that "Jesuits deal with laity as colleagues in

their ministries.” There is no doubt that this is our experience and that we are supported in and trusted with the work. I would agree, too, with the feeling expressed in the report that Jesuits are not generally given to spiritual conversation. There is a longing amongst lay colleagues for more sharing with Jesuits on the level of faith. Perhaps that dimension would grow if there were more opportunities for Jesuits and lay staff of spirituality centres to pray together and to share something of their experience – perhaps on occasional joint retreats.

Training of Directors of Annotations 18 and 19 Exercises

The Centre for Ignatian Spirituality in South Africa (Vuselela) is now in its fifth year and beginning to see the fruits of the training programmes for prayer guides and spiritual directors. The report (para. 2) raises the problem encountered when “colleagues who are well enough prepared to accompany simple Exercises in Daily life are, rather by accident, guiding people to make rather serious, life-affecting decisions such as changing careers or entering into a serious relationship.” Our program distinguishes very explicitly between Annotations 18 and 19 Exercises and the training needed to accompany directees in each of these ways. We offer two distinct programs, one for the training of prayer guides and a more advanced, in-depth training for those who wish to give Annotation 19 Exercises and on-going spiritual direction.

The Annotation 18 Exercises are most commonly given here using the model of the Week of Guided Prayer. (Days of Recollection are also offered.) The Week is a directed retreat in daily life with retreatants committing to a period of prayer each day and to meeting daily with a prayer guide. Those trained as prayer guides have knowledge and experience of different ways of prayer including *lectio divina*, gospel contemplation, and the examen. They are trained in basic listening skills and are competent to accompany another through a week’s prayer experience. The prayer guides are supervised throughout the week by an experienced spiritual director. The guides are well aware that they have been trained for a specific, limited ministry and that helping people to make major life decisions falls outside the scope of their training. Where it emerges that a retreatant needs such help,

the guides would refer the person to spiritual director for on-going direction which might lead to their making the Annotation 19 Exercises.

Those who are trained for the work of on-going spiritual direction and of the giving of Annotation 19 Exercises receive extensive training. Trainees must have made the full Exercises themselves according to Annotations 19 or 20 and have done the prayer guide training or its equivalent before applying for the program. The program consists of four key components which are emphasised throughout: facilitated reflection on the person's own experience of making the Exercises; the theology which underpins the Exercises; the role of the director in each of the Weeks (paying close attention to the annotations) and practical experience of directing a person through the Annotation 19 Exercises under close supervision. Other topics are also addressed, such as psychological issues and the Exercises, inculturation, and working with the Exercises ecumenically. The program involves meeting weekly for four hours over an eighteen month period, in addition to regular personal supervision. Annotation 19 Exercises here are almost without exception offered only to people who have been in spiritual direction for some time and who are invited by their spiritual director to make the Exercises.

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Keeping the Exercises authentic has been another important role of the training program for spiritual directors. When we began to offer the program, we discovered a small group of Methodists who had made the Exercises and were giving them to others with insufficient knowledge of the dynamic and theology of the Exercises. They had no training and no contact with Jesuits. Only one of them knew that Jesuits were connected to the Exercises. We realised how important the program had been to give the necessary in-depth formation to people who were passing on an inauthentic version of the Exercises without realising it.

The report mentions outreach programs that are actively ecumenical. Our experience has been that, while we did not begin with an ecumenical focus, Christians from the Methodist and Baptist and Anglican churches have resonated deeply with ignatian spirituality. Many have made Annotation 18

Exercises and some have done the full Exercises and the training to enable them to work as spiritual directors. It is ironic that there has been considerably greater desire for the Exercises from Protestants (who are also comfortable with lay directors) than from Roman Catholics, who need considerably more persuasion to hold a week of guided prayer or other simple ignatian exercises.

Staying Connected

Publications on Ignatian Spirituality tend to be expensive given the exchange rate and therefore difficult to access in South Africa. A notable exception is the *CIS Review of Ignatian Spirituality* which keeps us in touch with the latest developments in ignatian spirituality world-wide. *The Way's* new subscription rate for developing countries is very welcome, making it affordable for us. International contact is very important as we tend to feel isolated from others doing the work. The Rome consultation on partnership which I attended in 2002 was extremely helpful. It was heartening to see others grappling with similar issues in the area of Jesuit-lay partnership and the Exercises and to feel part of a wider communion of people world-wide deeply committed to ignatian spirituality.

The Rome meeting of 2002 resulted in a deeper awareness amongst our team of the importance of more collaboration amongst the various ignatian groups such as CLC, JRS and Jesuit Volunteers based in South Africa, and the Jesuits. We hosted a large gathering in July this year at which Fr Tetlow was the keynote speaker, in an attempt to connect people from these groups. Getting people to come together to discuss the emerging issues at local and international levels seems to me to be critical in the on-going process of reflecting on our experience – a key part of our ignatian way of being. Fr Joe Tetlow's visit also gave us the opportunity to discuss important issues and to draw on the experience of others in areas such as the formation of guides and giving Annotation 20 Exercises (which we will offer for the first time next year).

On-going formation of the core team is vital, particularly in areas such as giving supervision (referred to in the report as mentoring) to givers of Annotation 19 and 20 Exercises. Programmes such as these are not available in South Africa. It is extremely expensive to send core team members

overseas for further formation, and so the on-going formation of experienced spiritual directors, particularly those who are forming new directors, is not without difficulty.