



# Contemplation and Political Action: An Ignatian Guide to Civic Engagement



## **Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

On behalf of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, I'm very pleased to share "Contemplation and Political Action: An Ignatian Guide to Civic Engagement" with you. The document is a reflection on how our faith and Ignatian values might guide our pursuit of the common good in the public square.

One phrase comes up all the time in the Ignatian family related to our work for social justice: "men and women for others." These words seem simple enough, and perhaps they have been spoken so often they have lost a bit of their potency. But when they were first used in a major 1973 speech addressed to alumni of Jesuit schools by then-Jesuit Superior General Fr. Pedro Arrupe, reactions were not universally positive: Some people angrily resigned from Jesuit alumni associations in the wake of the address. Members of the press criticized the speech and attacked the speaker himself to the point where Pope Paul VI felt the need to send a letter affirming Fr. Arrupe and thanking him for his Gospel-rooted message.

Why such an outcry?

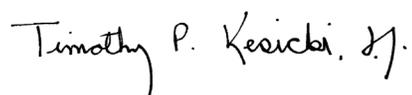
Fr. Arrupe's speech, in the tradition of the biblical prophets who criticized their own communities when they weren't living up to their values, called out Jesuit schools for not adequately preparing their students for the work of social justice. That message undoubtedly made some people uncomfortable. "Have we Jesuits educated you for justice? You and I know what many of your Jesuit teachers will answer to that question. They will answer, in all sincerity and humility: No, we have not," Fr. Arrupe said. "What does this mean? It means that we have work ahead of us."

It would be difficult work, Fr. Arrupe continued, but we have the tools to do it — tools still accessible to us today as we continue to pursue justice in our own era. We have the Ignatian tradition of "constantly seeking the will of God," discerning how God might be calling all of us to respond to the signs of the times. "Men and women for others" are therefore marked by a willingness to pay attention to the injustices around us and to develop a "firm resolve to be agents of change in society; not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements, but actively undertaking to reform them."

As we respond to the call to be agents of change in society inspired by God's special love for those on the margins, we will inevitably be led into the public square to participate in the messy, urgent work of politics. Through political and civic engagement, we can use our voices to advocate for the transformation of social structures that are marred by sins like racism, sexism, nativism, economic inequality, environmental degradation, the targeting of human life and dignity at every stage, and so many others.

"Contemplation and Political Action" is not a voter guide; it does not include a comprehensive list of political issues that members of the broad Ignatian family might care about. Instead, it applies our tradition of Ignatian spirituality to our shared political life. I hope all of us might approach it in this prayerful spirit. Consider the examples of civic engagement from our network that are included throughout and others with which you are familiar. Perhaps we might discuss what moves us or challenges us with members of our faith communities and how these reflections apply in our own contexts. I hope and pray that this resource provides us with the opportunity to examine the ways we engage in political action and dialogue as a people committed to a faith that does justice.

In Christ,



Fr. Timothy P. Kesicki, SJ  
President of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Gracious God,

In your loving heart, you made us.  
Each of us, you made unique.  
But it was not good that we should be alone,  
So you placed us in community.

You made a purpose for each of us: to serve you  
by serving our human family,  
And in turn to be protected and nurtured by it.  
You made us the Body of Christ.

You have taught us, your children, that we are  
called to be women and men for others:  
To walk with the excluded.  
To safeguard the abundant world you have made  
our common home.  
To call young people into a spirit of creativity and  
encounter, where your voice can be heard.  
And to show others, in the way we walk, a  
pathway to God.

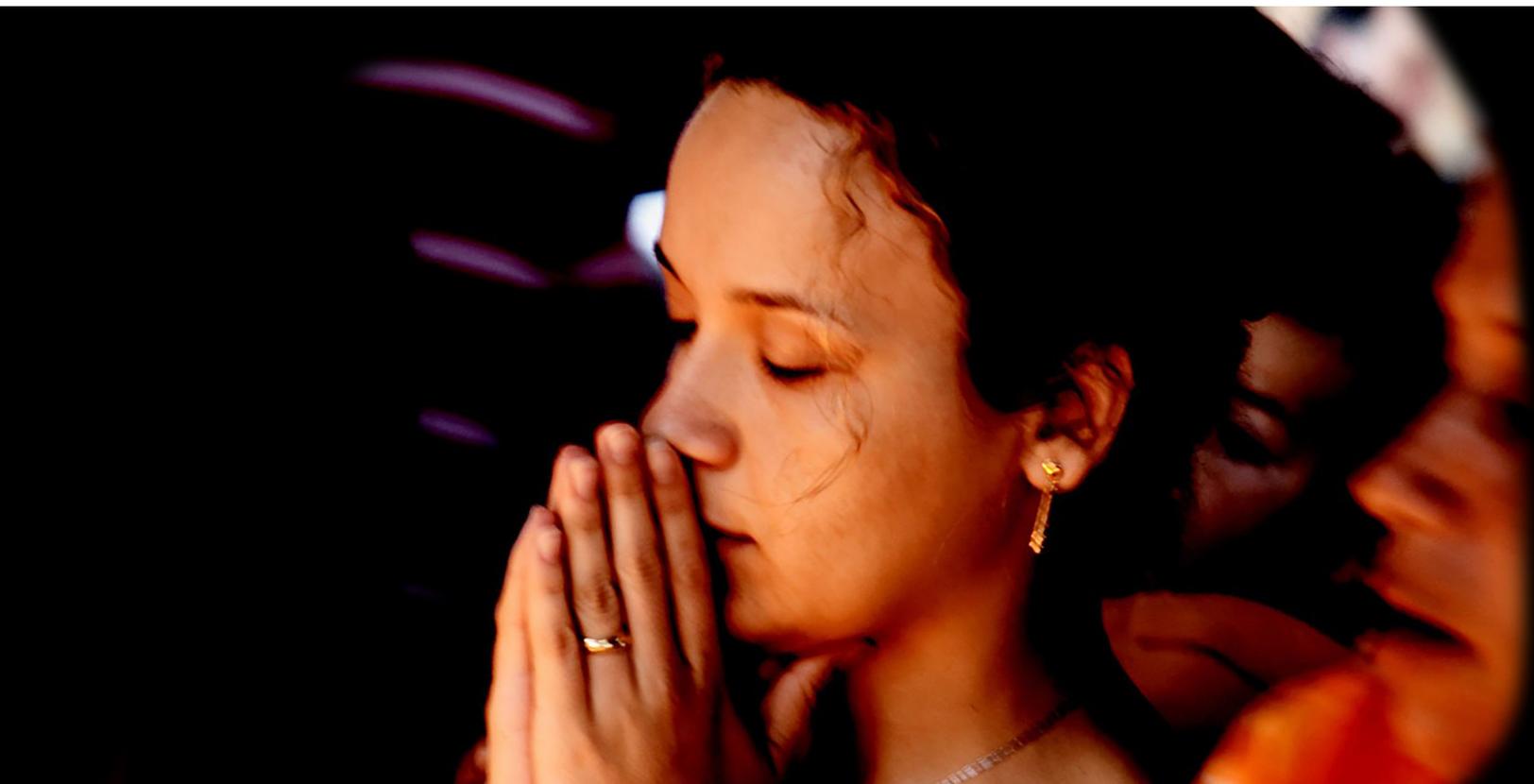
As we reflect on our calling  
to help build a just and sustainable society where  
all this is possible,  
We humbly turn to you:

Bless our bodies with strength and determination.  
Fill our hearts with the compassion of saints.  
Ordain our minds with wisdom and vision.  
Empower our spirits with faith and truth.  
Employ our hands to lay a lasting foundation to  
bless generations to come.

Lord, you invite us to find you in all things.  
As we collaborate as a people in the building of  
our society,  
*May we find you there.*  
In our principles and laws,  
*May we find you there.*  
In our policies and programs,  
*May we find you there.*  
In our courts and bureaus,  
*May we find you there.*  
In our streets and squares,  
*May we find you there.*  
And in our neighbors, especially those on the  
margins,  
*May we find you there.*

We make this prayer through Christ, Our Lord.

Amen.



## How Do I Use This?

**There are several ways we envision members of the Ignatian family using this document — whether in your own personal prayer or in dialogue with others.**

No matter how you engage with it, here are three things to keep in mind:

1. Reflection questions are provided throughout to encourage personal prayer with the document and/or communal discussion. Including people coming from a range of political perspectives may offer enriched discussion.
2. The document is longer than a news article and shorter than a book, so you can read it all at once or in chunks. A proposed three-part outline for reading in sections is included below, which might be helpful for planning group discussions over multiple gatherings.
3. Come with an open heart and mind! As this is a spiritual reflection document and not a laundry list of essential political issues and policy proposals, please try to approach it in that spirit: Read slowly and prayerfully instead of rushing through, sitting with the reflection questions included at the end of each section. What emotions are you feeling as you read? Are you challenged in any way? Encouraged? Consoled? Make note of how God is at work in your life as you read.

## Here are some potential contexts for engaging with the document:

1. Read and reflect on your own
2. Read and discuss with a group of “friends in the Lord”

If you have a group of “friends in the Lord” (how St. Ignatius referred to the first Jesuits) who like to come together and discuss matters of spirituality and social justice, you might want to use the document as the basis for a discussion. Consider inviting different members of the group to facilitate conversation for different sections.

3. Bring it to a faith-sharing group through a parish or retreat center  
Vibrant, small faith-sharing communities that meet either seasonally or on an ongoing basis are wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth. If you’re part of one of these groups or thinking about starting one, you might consider spending one to three sessions discussing the document.
4. In a high school or higher ed classroom

The document is accessible to high school-aged readers and up. Classes on Catholic social teaching or social justice in the Ignatian tradition might find the document a useful resource. Extracurricular groups involved in community service and social justice initiatives might also benefit from reading and sharing about it.

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## Suggested Three-Session Reading Outline

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# Contemplation and Political Action: An Ignatian Guide to Civic Engagement

## 1. Pope Francis' countercultural message: "A good Catholic meddles in politics."

It would be hard to share a more countercultural message than the one Pope Francis offered during a 2013 homily: "Good Catholics meddle in politics, offering the best of themselves, so that those who govern can govern," he said. "Politics, according to the Social Doctrine of the Church, is one of the highest forms of charity, because it serves the common good. I cannot wash my hands, eh? We all have to give something!"

Consider what Pope Francis is proposing here: Political participation is not merely worthwhile, but one of the "highest forms of charity." Charity, or the Latin *caritas*, is the highest theological virtue and a word for what we more commonly call "love." So, Pope Francis is saying that politics is an important way of loving God by loving our neighbor in an incarnational, concrete way. Catholics are called to get involved in politics — to "meddle," even! — instead of disengaging and avoiding the messiness of political life.

There's quite a contrast between the Holy Father's encouraging tone and some of the adjectives often paired with the word "politics" today — descriptors like polarized, dysfunctional, ugly, vitriolic or even irredeemable.

It would be fair to wonder if Pope Francis really meant what he said.

In fact, Pope Francis' positive view of what politics can be isn't new from a Catholic perspective. It echoes a theme found throughout papal writings over the past 125 years, such as St. Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life"): "By virtue of our sharing in Christ's royal mission, our support and promotion

of human life must be accomplished through the service of charity, which finds expression in personal witness, various forms of volunteer work, social activity and **political commitment**" (no. 87, emphasis ours). Their shared vision of politics as a worthwhile good reflects Catholic teaching on the essential role of governments at every level to protect human dignity and to promote the well-being of all. Plus, Pope Francis and his predecessors have worked with a broad definition of "politics" that transcends partisan brawling. Instead, they are referring to the ways local, national and even global communities come together to make decisions about their shared life.

Despite the generally sad state of our shared political life today, bringing our voices of faith to the public sphere through activities like issue-based legislative advocacy, community organizing and voting is essential to following Jesus as disciples. Why? Because civic participation is one powerful way we can work to uphold Christ's Gospel mandate to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and care for the ill and imprisoned with compassion (cf. Matthew 25:31-46). We feed the hungry through direct service, meeting individual needs as they arise. But we also go to the root of social ills and try to change systems and structures so people won't go hungry anymore. This latter work requires getting involved in politics.



For reflection and discussion:  
Do I think of politics as one of the highest forms of charity? Why or why not?

## **2. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that we are united as one human family and are called to cooperate for the common good and dignity of all.**

It's an image that's impossible to forget: Pope Francis alone in St. Peter's Square on a rainy Rome night, praying for the world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Connecting our shared experience to the Gospel story of Jesus calming a storm, the Holy Father lamented the injustices we have ignored in the years leading up to the pandemic that are even more vivid now. While the coronavirus does not discriminate, we know that those who are already the most poor and vulnerable are disproportionately affected by widespread illness. "In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste," Pope Francis said. "We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: 'Wake up, Lord!'"

What will our response be? Pope Francis said it is a "time of choosing" for us. Will we turn to isolationism? A "me and my own first" mentality? Or can we use this time to remember that we are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers, no matter where they are? "The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering," Pope Francis said that night. "The Lord awakens so as to reawaken and revive our Easter faith."

The pandemic has already led to many people adopting new ways of being, working and praying together, facilitated by technology. But it will take years before we see the full impact of COVID-19 on our shared political life. We pray for the grace to be awakened to our interconnectivity and to respond to the pandemic by recommitting to the protection of those who are most vulnerable.

## **3. Ignatian civic engagement requires confronting systemic racism.**

We offer these reflections against the backdrop of anti-racism protests that have swept across the United States and beyond. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery are

A woman waits in line at Catholic Charities' Spanish Catholic Center parking lot in Washington July 15, 2020, to pick up free food supplies. Catholic Charities USA agencies have provided nearly \$400 million in assistance during the first four months of the coronavirus pandemic. CNS photo/Chaz Muth



painful additions to a heartbreakingly long list of women and men of color who have been killed by police officers or armed vigilantes. Their violent deaths cry out for justice and move us to deep sadness and anger. Our commitment to protect the life and dignity of the human person requires us to confront racism wherever it exists. Any political engagement rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ that does not strive to dismantle systemic racism is woefully incomplete.

The Society of Jesus acknowledges our own involvement in systemic racism. Jesuits participated in slaveholding and the slave trade globally since the period of the order's founding. From the colonial era until the passage of the 13th Amendment, the involuntary labor of enslaved people in what is now the United States helped establish, expand and sustain Jesuit missionary efforts and educational institutions. After the abolition of slavery, while some Jesuits made important efforts in causes such as desegregation, in too many cases Jesuits continued to participate in racist practices such as holding people in debt slavery, denying fair compensation to Black workers, refusing to admit Black men to the order and perpetuating segregation in worship spaces, schools and elsewhere.

The Jesuits of Canada and the United States have only begun to confront this legacy seriously in recent years. In the United States, for example, the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project researches the lived experiences of

**“Yes, racism is a political issue and a social divide. But at its deepest level, racism is a soul sickness.”**

enslaved people owned by the Society of Jesus. The project is committed to a transformative process of truth-telling, reconciliation and healing that, in conversation with the descendants of those held in bondage, acknowledges historical harms, seeks to repair relationships and works within our communities to address the legacies of slavery that persist in the form of racial inequities today.

In Canada, the Jesuits participated in the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which investigated trauma suffered by Indigenous students in residential schools. The process led us first to say, “‘We are responsible,’ then ‘We



are sorry,' and finally, 'We need your help.'" The Canadian Jesuits made a formal apology for the harsh conditions, brutal punishment and sexual molestation that occurred in the school we ran, as well as for our participation in a system aimed at the assimilation of traditional Indigenous culture. We have responded to the TRC's calls to action with a number of initiatives, and we are very grateful to the many Indigenous people who have continued to welcome us as pastors and friends.

This work requires long-term commitment. We must continue to lament and redress our failures. We must continue to work with descendants of enslaved women and men, Indigenous partners and other people of color against racism within the Society of Jesus and beyond.

Fr. Bryan N. Massingale, a professor of theology at Fordham University and one of the most important voices on racial justice in the American church, invites all of us to pray as we work against racism. "Yes, racism is a political issue and a social divide. But at its deepest level, racism is a soul sickness. It is a profound warping of the human spirit that enables human beings to create communities of callous indifference toward their darker sisters and brothers," he wrote in a June 2020 National Catholic Reporter article. "This soul sickness can only be healed by deep prayer. Yes, we need social reforms. We need equal educational opportunities, changed police practices, equitable access to health care, an end to employment and housing discrimination. But only an invasion of divine love

will shatter the small images of God that enable us to live undisturbed by the racism that benefits some and terrorizes so many."

The countless believers whose faith has led them to stand up against racism around the world are great examples of the Gospel-inspired civic engagement we are encouraging in this document. We pray for God's love to fill our hearts and inspire us all to fight for racial justice.

#### **4. The Ignatian family, on a mission of reconciliation and justice and guided by the four Universal Apostolic Preferences, can help make political life better.**

Pope Francis' urging to practice our faith in civic life resonates deeply with our Ignatian values: We are committed to being "women and men for others," especially those on the margins of society. The 36th Jesuit General Congregation, held in 2016, called Jesuits and lay partners to work together in a mission of reconciliation and justice, as "we hear Christ summon us anew to a ministry of justice and peace." And we are inspired by generations of Jesuits, going back to St. Ignatius and the first companions, who have modeled life as contemplatives in action, drawing upon their faith to engage in the world instead of withdrawing from it. Civic participation led by these values and our

For Oglala Lakota student activist Jenna Tobacco, meeting with her elected representatives is about more than advocacy. "This is survival," she says. Tobacco and six other students from Red Cloud School — a Jesuit school on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota — attended the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice in 2019. The Teach-In, run by the Ignatian Solidarity Network, convenes over 2,000 students every November for a weekend of seminars on social justice. The Teach-In always culminates in a day of action on Capitol Hill.

Tobacco and her classmates met with South Dakota Senator John Thune to advocate for improved water safety on their reservation. The Dakota Access Pipeline — which runs oil through Pine Ridge's water source, the Missouri River — has leaked several times since it opened in 2017.

"I'm worried that if we lose our water again, we're going to lose ourselves," a student named Redpath Woman said. "Will we face the same harsh reality as Flint, Michigan?"

For several of these students, this is their second or third meeting with Thune. Even at a young age, they know that political change can be slow and requires tenacious and consistent advocacy.

faith in a God who has a special care for those who are poor can help us make politics better.

Our reflections on political participation are shaped by the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs), four guideposts for Jesuit ministry. The fruit of a multiyear discernment process across the entire Society of Jesus, confirmed by Pope Francis and promulgated by Superior General Fr. Arturo Sosa, the UAPs are a useful frame for thinking about and practicing our faith in the public square.

The UAPs are:

- A. To show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment;
- B. To walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice;
- C. To accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future;
- D. To collaborate in the care of our common home.

It's clear from the titles of the UAPs themselves that they have much to offer civic life, and they will be our backdrop as we meditate on Ignatian-informed participation in the political process.

We'll include discussion questions throughout the document, and we hope that this guide will encourage conversation and a renewed

commitment to civic engagement across the Ignatian family, from schools and colleges and universities to parishes and social centers and provincial offices to Jesuit communities and all ministries that carry on the Ignatian tradition.



How do I feel called to live out my faith in public?

## 5. Ignatian spirituality shapes our participation in civic life.

The Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian discernment lie at the heart of the Jesuit mission. All our works are grounded in the Ignatian spiritual tradition and seek, in their own way, to show the way to God. As Pope Francis wrote in his letter confirming the UAPs, "Without this prayerful attitude, the other preferences will not bear fruit." So, prayerful contemplation of our context is where we start when we reflect on political participation from an Ignatian perspective.

People gather during the annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 24, 2020. CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn





As someone who is committed to following Jesus, how does my political participation reflect that commitment? How might Ignatian spirituality and discernment guide my participation in civic life? How might my civic engagement, in turn, become a part of my prayer?

## 6. We try to find God in all things — including politics.

“You say grace before meals. All right,” wrote G.K. Chesterton, in a passage that echoes St. Ignatius’ reflection that God dwells in all things. “But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip the pen in the ink.” We can add our political life to this list, confident in our belief that God is always active in the world, even if we don’t always remember it or if God’s

presence isn’t always readily apparent.

If we approached civic involvement open to finding God in the messiness of politics, how might our engagement be different from the darker spirit we often find on cable news and social media? Maybe we would find some of the same fruits that often come with praying the Examen daily: increased gratitude, deepened awareness of God in unexpected places, humility in acknowledgment of our own shortcomings paired with trust in God’s gentle mercy to help us grow. These are all gifts of the Holy Spirit that would benefit our political life immensely.

It is our dedication to finding God in all things that draws us toward the political life in the first place. The foundation of our civic engagement is recognizing the dignity of all human beings, each one of whom is created in the image of God and bears the face of Christ, from the time of conception until natural death, and at all stages in between.



Politics can be a challenging place to find God. What prayers or practices can help me to see God at work there?

“I’m here because I really believe that life does start at conception and ends at natural death, and I think it’s important that we speak for people who can’t speak for themselves,” said Annie V., a student from Saint Ignatius College Prep in Chicago who attended the annual Ignatian Family Mass for Life in January 2020 in Washington, D.C. “One of our big things that Fr. Arrupe would talk about is being men and women for others. And so we’re being ‘for others’ ... [on behalf of] the voiceless.”

In the late 1990s, the Jesuit Conference started organizing an annual Mass for Life for students and partner groups who were coming to Washington for the annual March for Life, held near the anniversary of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, which legalized abortion throughout the United States. Today, the Ignatian Solidarity Network organizes and leads the Mass. Both the Mass and March are powerful public witnesses promoting the dignity of every human person, taking this core belief to the halls of power in the nation’s capital.

“As followers of St. Ignatius, we now hear the call to champion this great justice issue of our time,” the Jesuits of the United States wrote in a 2018 document on abortion titled “Protecting the Least Among Us.” “The Society of Jesus today exhorts its members and collaborators to find ever new and creative ways to bring the protection of the unborn and solidarity with mothers in difficult situations into whatever mission they serve.”

## **7. A big, worthwhile spiritual challenge is to practice detachment from our own political views. We are called to make choices in light of the Gospel.**

In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius writes that God created humans to “praise, reverence, and serve God,” and we should only engage with things, experiences and people as much as they help us fulfill that specific mission. This means leaving aside unhealthy attachments to whatever it is that might get in the way of loving God and neighbor.

One prominent source of attachment is our own individual political opinions, especially in this polarized era. We can be so committed to our biases that recent studies suggest that individuals’ political ideologies often shape their moral framework, instead of the other way around — the opposite of what our faith demands.

“Our challenge is to let the teaching of the Church, our faith, the Gospel, the person of Christ himself, to be the light by which we organize our politics and our involvement in the political field, and in the political world,” Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, said on this topic in a February 2020 interview. “We have to be involved in society,

but the Gospel has to be the principal lens through which we judge things. But sometimes — and we aren’t even always conscious of it — we allow our politics to be the lens by which we judge the Gospel. And I think that’s one of the sources of the division within the body of the Church.”

When we let Catholic social teaching guide our priorities, we might find that our consistent defense of human life and dignity leaves us “politically homeless,” staking out positions on issues that don’t conform to any party’s platform. The bishops of the United States describe this consistency beautifully in their document “Communities of Salt and Light”:

At a time of rampant individualism, we stand for family and community. At a time of intense consumerism, we insist it is not what we have, but how we treat one another that counts. In an age that does not value permanence or hard work in relationships, we believe marriage is forever and children are a blessing, not a burden. At a time of growing isolation, we remind our nation of its responsibility to the broader world, to pursue peace, to welcome immigrants, to protect the lives of hurting children and refugees. At a time when the rich are getting richer and the

Brophy College Prep in Phoenix students, including DACA recipient Saúl Rascón Salazar (second from right). Photo courtesy of Brophy Prep



poor are getting poorer, we insist the moral test of our society is how we treat and care for the weakest among us.

Detachment in political conversations and participation means being open to the possibility that someone we disagree with at the start might be right, or that the whole truth might not lie in a single party's or candidate's platform. We approach others with the "Ignatian Presupposition" from the Spiritual Exercises in mind — to be more ready to generously interpret another's views than to jump to conclusions about bad intent, even if our disagreement with them is profound.

Detachment means trying to stand in the shoes of those who have very different opinions than we do and trying to understand their motivations, their worldview and their pain. It is only by letting go of attachment to our own narrow perspective that we might be able to find the common ground which is the first step toward reconciliation.

Detachment from our own views should not diminish our passion in working for justice, or in speaking out on issues that are close to our hearts — we seek to transform the world for the better, which inevitably entails some conflict. But seeing all other people as beloved children of God, created in God's image and likeness, requires us to treat all people with respect.



How detached am I from my political beliefs? Am I truly open to the possibility that some of my views may not be perfectly in line with the Gospel? How can I become more open, while also remaining committed to core principles and values?

## 8. The difficult choices in civic life call for discernment.

In all moments that call for decision making, the Jesuits are "committed to practicing and spreading spiritual discernment, both personal and communal," Father General writes in the letter promulgating the UAPs. "This is a choice to seek and find the will of God, always, letting ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit."

Discernment isn't required for decisions that have clear good and bad options, but political life is dominated by judgment calls that aren't so cut and dry: How do we fight poverty? Welcome immigrants? Dismantle racism? Make our criminal

At Brophy Prep, a Jesuit high school in Phoenix, Arizona, the politics of immigration is personal. The school is home to about 17 students who either lack documentation or have temporary DACA status. (DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is an Obama-era federal policy that provides reprieve from deportation for certain individuals who migrated to the United States as children.)

In response to growing tension around migration in their community, students launched the DreamOn Campaign to raise awareness and support for these students on campus. As the campaign grew, students turned their on-campus advocacy into statewide action, organizing legislative meetings at the Arizona state capitol and forming coalitions with other high school activists across the state to advocate for welcoming and inclusive migration policies.

"The campaign really did change everything. It changed my mentality, my purpose of life, my world," says Yael Balbuena Basto, a DACA recipient who recently graduated from Brophy. "The campaign really made me realize that you are never too young to advocate for what is right."

In 2018, the DreamOn Campaign partnered local organizations and high schools to advocate for a state bill to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students graduating from Arizona high schools. Until then, undocumented college students paid out-of-state tuition — nearly three times that of their documented peers. Their campaign ultimately led the Arizona Board of Regents to reduce the tuition.

justice system fairer? End sexism and gender discrimination? Protect the most vulnerable members of the human family, including the unborn? We can bring our tradition of discernment to these questions and hundreds more, creating physical and spiritual spaces where everyone has room and time to share, all perspectives are considered, pros and cons are weighed and periods of prayerful reflection frame the conversation.

Real discernment requires us to nurture our relationship with Christ in that deepest part of our self. It is not about imposing our views on others, but about collaborating to learn more about God's hopes for our world and how best to live those out, in the humility that we cannot do it alone.



Discernment in the political sphere requires hearing from a wide variety of perspectives, including those I may find troubling. Which voices do I listen to? Which voices do I tune out?

## 9. Our approach to politics is rooted in closeness with those on the margins of society.

One of Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ's, favorite words is "kinship."

Fr. Boyle founded and serves as the director of Homeboy Industries, which works with gang members in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. He uses "kinship" to describe Homeboy's vision.

"Serving others is good. It's a start. But it's just the hallway that leads to the Grand Ballroom," he writes in his modern classic "Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion." "Kinship — not serving the other, but being one with the other."

This vision is most beautifully captured in a poetic section also from "Tattoos on the Heart," which describes an ever-widening circle of kinship that leaves nobody out. It's worth considering in full:

No daylight to separate us.

Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that

Students of the *Foi et Joie Haiti* education program. Photo: Magis Americas



God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.

This passage calls to mind Pope Francis' "throwaway culture" — in which the poor and vulnerable are disposed of because they don't contribute to the expansion of a market economy — and its antidote, the "culture of encounter," which calls on those with power and privilege to cross boundaries and build relationships with people pushed to the margins.

"To walk with the poor," as it's stated in the Universal Apostolic Preferences, requires closeness to them, deep listening to their stories and the hard work of understanding the social injustices that are contributing to their suffering. As Fr. Boyle writes: "Here is what we seek: a

compassion that can stand in awe at what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment at how they carry it."

Community service events and short-term service immersion trips are a good start, but we are called to go further. Sustained connection and genuine relationships with individuals and communities on the margins ultimately lead to our own conversion. True accompaniment on the margins includes making sure those affected by injustice are able to use their own voices to propose and work for solutions. "The world's peoples want to be artisans of their own destiny...They do not want forms of tutelage or interference by which those with greater power subordinate those with less," Pope Francis has said, borrowing a phrase about the importance of self-determination from St. Pope Paul VI's encyclical "Populorum Progressio" ("On the Development of Peoples"). The saying "voice for the voiceless" works for our advocacy on behalf of the unborn, but it does not fit while working with other marginalized individuals and groups in the public sphere.

Often, when we think about those who are excluded or oppressed, we can look outward — outside the gates of our own Jesuit school or parish or college or office. But as Dr. Mary Wardell-Ghirarduzzi, Vice Provost for Diversity Engagement and Community Outreach at the University of San

Creating a more just world requires social change at both the local and national levels. The Jesuit work *Foi et Joie* (French for "Faith and Joy") aims to transform harsh social and economic realities in Haiti through community-based education. *Foi et Joie* runs 17 schools, educating over 4,000 students throughout rural Haiti and providing teacher trainings and government workshops to improve education at all Haitian schools. In working with rural communities, *Foi et Joie* provides skills-based education, encouraging students to become entrepreneurs, leaders and advocates in their communities.

"Haitian families will sacrifice everything for their kids' education," says Emilio Travieso, SJ, assistant director of *Foi et Joie*. "But if we can turn that around and make schools a place where wealth is generated, then we can turn that around and create jobs, too."

One initiative that adopts this creative approach is *Foi et Joie*'s partnership with local farmers and beekeepers to teach students about sustainable honey agriculture. Maintaining beehives not only helps existing farms with pollination, it also provides a second source of income through harvested honey. Learning these hands-on skills and small business strategies will prepare students to strengthen their local economies when they graduate.

Francisco, said during an address to the Ignatian Colleagues Program, the UAPs' call to accompany the poor requires us to "break away from this invisibility that is in and amongst us, even as we are doing this remarkable and beautiful work as a beloved community. We are being called...to think about who are the individuals who are the poor amongst us." The Ignatian family and our wide network of institutions are not immune to sins of exclusion based on race, ethnicity, gender and more. As we strive to accompany those who are oppressed and truly learn from them, it is essential for us to start right at home.



How many of my friends come from a different social class, race or culture from my own?

## 10. We hear stories of the marginalized and we read the signs of the times. This "dual listening" shapes us, our political priorities and our action.

Emerging from real closeness with those who are poor and vulnerable comes a desire to work for social justice through political action. Friendship has changed us, and we can't help but want to work together to change the social structures that are oppressing our friends.

In the Book of Exodus, God hears the cries of the Israelites in slavery and intervenes on their behalf. God's special love for the oppressed should always be on our hearts and in our minds, shaping our political priorities. We judge the economy not by how it serves those at the top, but those who are materially poor.

In her book "Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living," Margaret Silf writes about extending careful, attentive listening to the wider world around us in a practice of "reading the signs of the times."

The Jesuit "Principle and Foundation" requires us to protect all gifts, especially relationships with God, others and our planet. We can work together to save our planet and its nonhuman animals. But loving the Earth and everybody on it, and not just the few, is a primary criterion of our way of proceeding. Photo by Sergei Tokmakov



This work of reading the signs of the time, Silf writes,

is about getting in touch with the invisible currents under the immediate surface of society, and discerning, at this level, what is leading us towards a fuller humanity, and what is diminishing our human-ness. In each of us there is a potential mystic and a potential prophet. The mystic intuits what is really going on beneath the surface of things, notices the divine amid the ordinary, and sees others with God's eyes. The prophet addresses what the mystic sees, challenging all that is threatening to undermine humanity's journey towards life-in-all-its-fullness, and encouraging all that is nourishing and empowering that journey.

Silf's image of a mystic and prophet inside of us echoes the Jesuit commitment to being "contemplatives in action." We see the face of Christ in those suffering on the margins and we pay careful attention to societal forces that are shaping our communities. We discern our political priorities from that dual listening. And this discernment leads us to prophetic action.



What societal forces are most threatening to human life and dignity today? How might I be able to address them — in my own life and in collaboration with other members of my community?

### **11. One sign of the times we cannot ignore: Our planet is in peril.**

"Think of one gift you delighted in receiving. Perhaps it was a piece of clothing, or jewelry, or art. Maybe it was something your child or friend had made, or an heirloom passed on to you by a dear grandparent," writes Fr. Greg Kennedy, SJ, of the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. "Whatever it is, picture it now and remember the moment you received it. See the person who gave you this special gift. Bring their face to mind.

Organizing walkout protests, keeping classroom lights off, using reusable water bottles and writing their political representatives — these are some of the ways that Jesuit schools and organizations take action to care for our common home.

In 2019, students and faculty from a number of Jesuit schools across the U.S. and Canada joined the Global Climate Strike movement, urging international governments to stop the acceleration of climate change. Led by youth, Indigenous people and environmental activists, the strike embodies the environmental teachings of Pope Francis' "Laudato Si'" and the Universal Apostolic Preferences. Through this movement, the Ignatian family not only stood in solidarity with each other but with the marginalized communities most impacted by climate change and environmental injustice.

"My message to adults regarding climate change is: Listen to your kids. You love them, you care about them and their future is on the line," said Benjamin Champion, an environmental activist at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, D.C. He urged adults to divest from fossil fuels, vote and talk to their leaders in Congress.

In Canada, Centre Justice et Foi, the Jesuit Forum and Canadian Jesuits International marched with Greta Thunberg and First Nations activists, demanding that Canadian and international governments tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions and fossil fuel dependency and promoting scientific innovation.

“Now imagine the look on their face as they watch you take their gift and flush it down the toilet or smash it with a hammer.”

This is how we’re treating God, who has given our common home to us as a gift, when we destroy the Earth so brazenly, Kennedy writes. “How must the Creator of the Earth feel when he sees how unhappy we are with what we receive? If everyone on this planet lived like North Americans, consuming and disposing as we do here, human beings would need the equivalent of five Planet Earths just to keep up. Rather than ‘thank you’ we repeatedly say, ‘is that all?’”

Kennedy echoes Pope Francis’ groundbreaking 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’.” As the Holy Father posted on Twitter that same year, excerpting from the document, “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.” The tweet was shared more than 60,000 times on the pope’s English account alone, one of the most retweeted posts the Holy Father has ever made. His directness struck a nerve and calls us to action.

Awareness of the damage we are doing to our planet through carbon emissions and other forms of pollution is higher than ever, and there are lots of ways we can all do our part to steward the gift of creation more faithfully. Getting in touch with the beauty of creation can encourage us to do more to protect it. “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God,” Pope Francis writes in “Laudato Si’.” “The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.”

Cultivating this closeness with creation changes us. Taking part in an ecological examen is a uniquely Ignatian way to see how we have already been affected by our relationship with nature and how we might be called to deeper conversion.

Political engagement on behalf of the Earth is also an important way of protecting creation. While individual and even communal efforts to reduce consumption of energy and goods are worthwhile

and part of a life of virtue, governments can make huge, positive impacts through creation-friendly laws and policies. So yes, we should turn out the lights when we leave a room — but also write a letter to our elected representative or join a protest urging climate action. The climate strikes of 2019, which featured a good deal of youth-led Ignatian involvement around the world, offered a good example of civic engagement on behalf of the planet.

Caring for creation is intimately tied to accompanying those who are poor and working for social justice. This connection is due to “integral ecology,” or the idea that caring for the planet and caring for people on the margins go hand in hand. “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities,” Pope Francis writes in “Laudato Si’” (no. 117), “it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” Environmental destruction and climate change have a disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable, many of whom depend on the land for food and income. We must hear and respond to “the cry of the earth and the cry of poor” (“Laudato Si’” no. 49).



Do I take time to notice beauty around me? Am I making daily choices that keep the good of the planet in mind?

## 12. Conclusion

Our mission of reconciliation and justice, articulated by the UAPs, calls us to practice our faith in the public sphere. Here are four key themes that express our distinctively Ignatian way of carrying this out:

1. Our political action emerges from discerning how Christ is already active in the world and cooperating with his saving work, as opposed to acting out of our own limited ideologies.
2. Listening is at the heart of civic engagement — listening to the marginalized, the young, those we don’t agree with, the cry of the Earth. True listening is detached from our own preconceptions and prejudices.

3. Kinship and accompaniment with those on the peripheries require including their own voices at the center of our civic engagement.
4. Without a life of prayer and spiritual practice, our civic engagement would lack the grounding that makes it Christian.

We hope this chance to reflect on how our Catholic, Ignatian values might influence our political participation will spark thoughtful conversation and action throughout the Society of Jesus and the broad Ignatian family.

Young people gather for the Ignatian Solidarity Network “public witness” gathering near the U.S. Capitol in Washington Nov. 18, 2019. An advocacy day on Capitol Hill followed the rally, attended by 1,500 participants of a weekend teach-in on justice issues. Photo by Doris Sump



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