Radical Care: Applying Ignatian values to the work of the Office of Care and Support Services

For my capstone towards recognition as a Xavier University Ignatian Educator of Distinction, I offer the following reflection on ways this important program has shaped and informed my work as an Assistant Director and Care Manager in the Office of Care and Support Services. The student population served by our office typically requires higher levels of support because they are usually in some sort of crisis or distress. Our office primarily works with students who are walking in the margins and it is our charge to walk alongside them, supporting them in individualized ways. We respond with a strong outreach that demonstrates the Jesuit value of holistic support, *Cura Personalis*, care for the whole person. We believe that every student deserves a companion along the way with the appropriate amount of needed support and follow-though.

As I recall the stories of the long path toward the calling of becoming a Jesuit priest, I reflect on the path of our undergraduate students. The Jesuits study for approximately 11 years, and our Xavier undergrads typically 4. The tenacity of the words of our forthcoming Jesuit speakers were empowering and insightful as they spoke of the needy populations that they will serve once they complete their studies. I have incorporated a few of the speakers’ powerful anecdotes to share with my students when they feel worried or unsure about a next step.

I was particularly inspired by Fr. Jim McCann, SJ, and his discussion of the way we move to action, and how do we know we are going in the right direction. We are sifting through daily experiences to learn our desires and repulsions when we pay active, purposeful attention. The movement is outwards, opening to others, and exudes generosity. When we lack, we experience desolation. We aspire towards grace-filled enlightenment and consolation in the form of helpful resources or empowering habits to teach our students.

I believe that physical movement towards a goal, no matter how small, brings unhelpful thoughts out of the mind and back into the body, compelling us to do something about our situation compared to the alternative of sitting, unmoving, frozen in fear. I believe that through movement, active discernment is set in motion. We give ourselves permission to carve out space for dedicated thought (such as a spiritual examen), and we act on our reflections.

Some days I ask students to do “Just do one thing” towards their goal. I rely on Newton’s first law, A body in motion stays in motion. I offer easily attainable, high success-response tasks as options. For example, I will offer students two Jesuit Resources pamphlets that I keep in my office, The Mission Mile[[1]](#footnote-1), and the Father Michael J. Graham SJ Legacy Labyrinth[[2]](#footnote-2) and ask them to go to one or more of the on-campus sites, sit for at least 10 minutes, and return in our next meeting with an opinion or reflection of the experience. It is a good conversation starter into more difficult topics, is accessible to all in the campus community, and most importantly, there are no wrong answers just different perspectives to share and discuss.

This applied experience uses interaction to shape the examen and ways to encourage creating spaces for opening our mind to different ideas. From there we are gifted space for reflection and active communal discernment where we talk things out, and progress is made. Walking on the Mission Mile, in the Labyrinth, going to a museum, taking a walk on Wasson Way, or being in a place on or around campus that can provide a respite for you and your mind is a perfect choice. Go do one thing. Go to the place, read the summary, and reflect on the answer. Once we have allowed that space to exist, we can reflect. A special Jesuit reflection is called a “spiritual examen.” It is a doable, daily reflection guide to help individuals grow closer to God and to better understand life’s next steps.

Once we have the space to reflect, I call upon the session by Laura Ruwe, in which she recounted her experiences at the Cincinnati Art Museum as a docent, but with the cool Jesuit twist of adding the spiritual examen into the experience. I love the relevance, the creativity, and the accessibility to all. Looking at a painting during a period of reflection feels like adding fodder into our thoughts and future actions. The beauty and power of art are so intertwined with creative inspiration and spiritual practice which provides space for discernment and clarity.We reflect on this prayerful practice to detect God’s presence in our lives, and to discern God’s direction for us.

Laura describes the experience at the museum, asks us to look longer, asks us what is drawing my attention? What do you bring to the art? What part of your human experience is visible in the examen through the lens of the art? What emotions are brought up? She reminds us to always give thanks for this insight and clarity. This deep space for discernment, especially for student at a crossroads, in distress, challenged by crisis, or making hard decisions is a place to plant the seeds that will ultimately grow into the important questions they will ultimately answer.

1. Clear your mind, and silence your phone
2. Look at the art
3. Walk through the examen[[3]](#footnote-3) You can choose one that best fits your current life experience or thoughts.
4. Record your experience in your journal

Ask yourself: What do I know? What do I think I know? What do I need to do?

We plant seeds by asking questions. We encourage movement, no matter how slow or how large the task may seem. We support students where they are, and encourage growth and learning new perspectives always. As Care Managers, we provide students space for discernment, offer resources to help them feel more on control of themselves and to course-correct and support their forthcoming plans. Our connection to the Ignatian values helps us to provide immediate direction to students, which provides us avenues into student clarity, success, improvement and retention.

1. [MissionMile.pdf](https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/documents/MissionMile.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Fr. Michael J. Graham, S.J. Legacy Labyrinth - Mission Identity - Xavier's Mission | Xavier University](https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/buildings-statues-and-beauty/fr-michael-j-graham-s.j-legacy-labyrinth) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Daily Examen Resources](https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/resources-by-theme/daily-examen-resources) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)