

# First Studies ...and Service

FOLLOWING TWO YEARS IN THE NOVITIATE,  
JESUITS CONTINUE THEIR FORMATION  
IN THE FIRST STUDIES PROGRAM

When Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, and Peter Faber studied at the University of Paris, they had little idea that 500 years later young Jesuits would follow in their footsteps by attending lectures in philosophy and theology, writing papers, and preparing for exams. Like later Jesuit scholastics John Berchmans and Aloysius Gonzaga, the 37 young Jesuits in the First Studies Program at Loyola University also serve the poor in ministry placements in which they spend eight to ten hours a week. Representing nine different provinces in the US, these men come to Loyola immediately after pronouncing perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience following their two-year noviceship. The young Jesuits use their three years in First Studies to prepare themselves intellectually and spiritually for the service of God's people in the Church just as their brothers in similar programs at Fordham University and St. Louis University are doing.

The alarm ringing in his ear early in the morning challenges the young Jesuit to face a day of prayer, academic work, service to his materially poor brothers and sisters, physical exercise, lunch and dinner encounters with his peers and other community members, and celebration of daily Eucharist—the central point of a Jesuit's day.

Ignatius believed in intellectual rigor. Aristotle, Aquinas, and a host of philosophers stimulate questions of existence, belief in God, the meaning of the human person, the difference between right and wrong, and how we can know any of this.

All of these questions and more occupy the thoughts of the young Jesuit pursuing philosophical knowledge.

But St. Ignatius's vision for formation was much broader than philosophy alone. To help the Jesuit lay the groundwork for his later study of theology before priestly ordination, his First Studies curriculum includes the Pentateuch, the Gospels, the Church's social teachings, moral questions, and understanding of the Trinity and Christology.

Close reading of text, analysis of reasoning, and understanding thesis development all demand the habit of critical reasoning and sound judgment. But as Ignatius well

knew, such reasoning and judgment can also be tested in other ways—like in a game of ultimate frisbee, watching playoff games, or figuring out *24* at a weekly gathering before the TV set! Ignatius wanted his men to be well rounded and, like Peter Faber, able to deal with all kinds of people on their terms. Good apostles take vital interest in what challenges God's people.

Two points of uniqueness characterize the Loyola program: first, the scholastics live with older, formed Jesuits rather than in houses devoted completely to students. Thus they learn how active Jesuits live and what they do from their first days after vows. Second, the linchpin of the Loyola First Studies program is the 8 to 10 hours which men devote to the service of the materially poor, whether chaplaincy in a hospital setting, teaching disadvantaged inner city students or immigrants learning language or computer skills, visiting prisoners, or elderly people needing assistance with shopping, doctors' appointments, and basic services. Just as they rigorously engage their minds, so also do they challenge their hearts in their ministry.

Jesuit scholastic saints John Berchmans and Aloysius Gonzaga served the poor in their day. Aloysius tended plague victims and ultimately died from the



Fr. John Libens, SJ, and Mr. Bill Blazek, SJ, discuss their day in the community kitchen. An important part of the First Studies program is combining students with Jesuits of various experience so they can learn from each other.

## Upcoming Vocations Events

For more information about the Jesuits, please contact



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### Six Weeks a Jesuit

**Come join us** for an in-depth experience of Jesuit life. Each summer the North American Jesuit Vocation Directors sponsor the Six-Weeks-a-Jesuit program. From the end of June to the beginning of August, candidates for the Society of Jesus from all over the US and Canada immerse themselves in Jesuit life. The program during the summer of 2006 will take place in New York and Canada, and participants will live in Jesuit communities and work in Jesuit apostolates. In addition, participants will gather for weekly conferences that introduce different aspects of Jesuit life. The program begins and ends with an orientation and closing weekend. There is also a get-away weekend of fun/reflection halfway into the program. Participants in the Six-Weeks-a-Jesuit program should be men who are seriously discerning God's call to the Jesuit vocation and are willing to commit themselves to a summer of serious and intentional prayer, work, reflection, and fun. For more information please contact Fr. Dave Godleski, SJ, at 773-975-6363 or e-mail him at [vocations@jesuits-chi.org](mailto:vocations@jesuits-chi.org)



As part of the First Studies program Mr. Eric Sundrup, SJ, volunteers at St. Procopius Grade School in Pilsen on Chicago's South Side, where he helps teach religion to third graders.

plague himself. So it is in the long tradition of Jesuit formation to challenge the heart through service. But we go further. We believe that this service of the poor informs the questions in philosophy and theology and, in turn, studies inform the way these young Jesuits approach the questions arising in their everyday lives of service. Both their intellectual and ministerial lives challenge their spiritual lives so that the Christ they encounter in prayer has a very human, contemporary face. At midday and in the evening, in their examination of conscience, which Ignatius prescribed twice a day for the Jesuit, these young men seek to find where God has been with them, acted through them, and invited them to a deeper relationship with Him.

Jesuits in First Studies work and pray hard. Their days are full. They are the most generous they will ever be in their Jesuit lives. Highly idealistic and desirous of serving God's people, these future priests are a sign of hope for each other and all those with whom they come into contact in the classroom, in ministry, and in their very

presence as counter-cultural signs of God's love for human kind in a world whose values they do not readily accept. Their commitment brings hope to the Society of Jesus and the Church.

At the end of their years of study, the young Jesuits go off to regency, a period of active engagement in a Jesuit apostolate, most usually in an educational setting. From there they will go to theology and priestly ordination, for which First Studies will have laid the groundwork. ■



*Fr. John Libens, SJ, has been superior and director of the Jesuits First Studies Program since 2000. Prior to that he was provincial of the Detroit Province. Fr. Libens has also served as rector of the Weston Jesuit Community, principal and president at St. John's Jesuit High School in Toledo, and formation director for the Detroit Province where he also did province planning and coordinated secondary education.*