

LightWorks

A New Doorway to Ignatian Spirituality

The Ignatian Spirituality Centers of Denver, Kansas City, and St. Louis have introduced LightWorks, a program that offers new opportunities for people to experience Ignatian spirituality and prayer.

The term “lightworks” is a translation of the phrase ejercicios leves taken from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. In the Eighteenth through the Twentieth Annotations, Ignatius discusses ways to present the exercises to different kinds of people in different life circumstances. Ignatius wanted

spiritual directors to adapt the exercises to the needs of each person who seeks guidance in prayer and in their life in Christ. To persons who, for various reasons, the Spiritual Exercises in their complete form are not suitable at a given time, Ignatius would give “light exercises,” or “lightworks.”

Fathers Stephen Yavorsky, Vernon Heinsz, and John Callahan describe the ways the LightWorks program is being presented by the Ignatian Spirituality Centers in their areas.

LightWorks in Kansas City BY FATHER VERNON HEINSZ SJ

*S*t. Ignatius of Loyola placed great emphasis on his Spiritual Exercises, and he wisely indicated that they were to be adapted to individuals and to their circumstances. Such is the case with “LightWorks,” an adaptation of and an introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Our LightWorks program in Kansas City began in the fall of 2006. The fourteen-week program was open to anyone in the Kansas City area interested in “an introduction to Ignatian spirituality centered on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.”

We began our orientation on September 26, 2006. Some of the people who responded, and have

continued to participate in our original group of thirteen, are two married couples, a religious sister, a non-Catholic, and a married man who was at first considering, and now has entered, the permanent diaconate program in the diocese. The common bond of those responding is the desire to grow in a more conscious, personal relationship with God in an Ignatian way.

Our meetings on Tuesday evenings follow a simple pattern: quieting in the presence of God and an opening prayer, general comments and questions on how the past week of prayer has gone, time for group sharing on what happened during the past week, a director’s presenta-

tion of an Ignatian topic pertinent to the group, readings and “points for prayer” for the coming week, and a closing prayer together. The pattern has worked well. Though the meetings are structured, the tone and movement of the evenings have a retreat atmosphere.

At our meetings people question, comment, and discuss both difficult and joyful experiences in prayer. They share and listen to each other about their prayer during the week. These experiences of sharing widen each person’s understanding of the way God deals with us.

Participants also reflect and talk about views of God, ways of praying, suggestions for periods of prayer,



Father Vernon Heinsz

ways of reflecting on one's prayer, and one's day, in order to notice where God is acting, and ways of "following Jesus" by contemplating Jesus in the gospels — all from an Ignatian perspective. Such topics and practices have opened doors for participants as they grow in their relationship with God in their daily lives.

Here are written responses made by five members of our group about their experience in LightWorks:

"LightWorks has been a wonderful experience for me. My personal prayer life was pretty much non-existent. The exercises from LightWorks have improved my spirituality with God and renewed my enthusiasm for reading the Bible. One of my blessings is that the Book of Psalms has come to life for me. Spending time meditating on the Psalms, I have come to appreciate what beautiful poems or songs of praise they are. I would recommend LightWorks to anyone who wants a deeper relationship with our Lord."

"I have found LightWorks very beneficial. I came for two reasons: to see how this sort of thing went with a group and to learn to use Scripture better

myself as a source of prayer. I am impressed with what the other people say at the sessions — how it is enriching their prayer lives. I know it has helped me personally — I am more comfortable using Scripture as a prayer source now than I was in the past."

"I believe LightWorks has given me insights into bringing God closer in my daily life. I find myself experiencing His presence in personal ways that I did not recognize before. I feel like I have a new awareness of His concern for me as an individual, and I now have a personal relationship with God."

"I like the format of LightWorks. Regular meetings are important because they keep me on track. Even though I might become lazy and let myself down, I do not want to let the group down. I find the interaction with other participants very helpful. Sometimes I am stuck, at a loss, and when another person shares something, it acts like a spark for me. I have been told that I have had that effect on others at times. I am always amazed when someone mentions that something I said helped them. Often

it is something that wasn't all that important to me at the time. The Holy Spirit works in peculiar ways."

"I'm very thankful to be part of LightWorks. While I've known that "prayer is important," only now am I starting to catch a glimpse of what it's really about. While I might have said before that I had a personal relationship with Christ, now I'm beginning to grasp that the God of Love is with me in ways I actually notice. I'm thankful that God is increasing my desire to pray, and to follow Jesus. I think in the past I've kept Him at arm's length."

Overall, it appears that LightWorks participants have grown in their life of prayer. They have strengthened their faith and relationship with God. They have been able to share insights, joys, and struggles of their faith journey with others. And they encourage others to participate in LightWorks.

What might happen after the fourteen-week program ends? Participants have had an experience of Ignatian spirituality and aspects of the Spiritual Exercises. For some, that experience is enough; they may want nothing more at present. For others, their experiences of LightWorks may lead to experiencing the journey and graces of the full Spiritual Exercises, which is another program offered by our Ignatian Spirituality Center in Kansas City.

The 2007-08 LightWorks program begins on September 25. Those who would like further information on LightWorks in Kansas City may contact me (vheinsz@jesuits-mis.org), or Joseph Cirincione at the Ignatian Center (call 816-523-5115, Ex 212, or e-mail jcirincione@sfx.org).

LightWorks in Denver BY FATHER STEPHEN YAVORSKY SJ

How to offer a way for people to learn to pray more fully and deeply than before; how to show a way that can help people integrate their adult lives; how to provide an instrument that stretches minds, hearts, and imaginations; how to offer story and teaching and prayer and sharing; how to draw people to even more completely live in Christ? Invite them to LightWorks.

In the Denver area, LightWorks is offered at Regis University and at St. Ignatius Loyola parish. Each program includes fourteen meetings of an hour and a half each. The first four meetings are in October. The next seven meetings are in January and February, and the last three meetings are after Easter.

The Regis University group meets in the afternoon after the workday, and the meetings at St. Ignatius Loyola take place in the evening after dinner. The Regis group is made up of university faculty members and staff, and the Loyola participants are parish members and people from other parishes and other interested people. They are men and women of all ages and from differing backgrounds. They have expressed a desire to learn more about prayer, develop a discipline of prayer, receive guidance in prayer, or simply get closer to God.

At the beginning of the program I talk about what actually happens when people pray and pay attention to their inner experience, and what it means to “stay where you find fruit.” I speak of the importance of coming to know Jesus through our personal experiences, of how discernment and fullness of life are rooted in this relationship, and of how these experiences are unique to each person.

Ignatius paid careful attention to his own experience, took notes, and grew by reflecting and sharing. People who join LightWorks commit themselves to pray, to reflect on their experience, and to share their experiences with each other.

Every session opens with a prayer and an awareness exercise. After a presentation and discussion, people gather into their small faith sharing groups. They share with each other what happened between them and God during the past week, whether during prayer or at other times. Sharing our experience and listening with reverence to the experience of others confirms and throws light on these experiences.

in prayer, or share when they meet with their group. Participants also are given brief articles and written reflections at meetings — on prayer as relationship, on discernment, on God, on Jesus, on freedom, on how life and prayer affect each other, on how to reflect on and share our experience.

Shortly before the end of a meeting the group is called to silence in order to have a quiet, very brief “examen” on the session itself, to recall where they most experienced God and what helped or hindered their engaging with God. At the close of the meeting the group prays a traditional night prayer, “Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake, watch over us as



Father Stephen Yavorsky

LightWorks people receive Scripture passages and exercises at each meeting for their daily prayer time during the following week. They pay attention and note experiences during their prayer times that they may wish to revisit later

we sleep. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared.” It is a comforting ritual.

In the weeks between the three series of meetings, participants become faithful to regular prayer on their own, and experience the

difficulties of that. Some groups have gathered together periodically in each other's homes during these intervals.

This year we added one session, called the "Advent Event," which was open to anyone. This allowed people in LightWorks to invite spouses or friends, and also people who were curious about the program.

In the evaluation at the end of last year's retreat one woman wrote, "I formed a real relationship with God. Jesus became a person, a friend, a lover. I continue to deepen in

this, even though there are times of struggle, it opened me up. I felt like I was living in a box of fear prior to this retreat."

One of the men in the program wrote, "I think there is a perception that the Spiritual Exercises were some magical words that we would learn that would show the way to enlightenment and let us take some sort of shortcut to a higher level of consciousness. I found LightWorks to be like getting a toolbox to help build a connection to God; without this toolbox it can still be built, but it

will take longer and be much harder. You are still the one who has to pick up and use the tools, and they have to be used properly to make the connection strong."

Readers interested in LightWorks 2007 at St. Ignatius Loyola Parish may contact me at syavorsky@jesuits-mis.org. People in the Regis University community may contact Kathleen Schaefer, Director of Ignatian Spirituality, mschaeffe@regis.edu, or call 303-458-4956.

LightWorks in St. Louis BY FATHER JOHN CALLAHAN SJ

The LightWorks program in St. Louis is designed to introduce participants to the spirituality modeled by St. Ignatius Loyola. Participants learn and experience different methods of prayer that Ignatius features

in the Spiritual Exercises. We use the Ignatian practices of sacred reading, prayer of the heart, imaginative prayer, consideration, and what Ignatius called contemplation. Most of all, as we slowly read, consider, and imagine ourselves in a gospel scene, we are invited to pay careful attention to the movements and feelings that take place in the deepest part of ourselves.

Participants are also introduced to some of the great themes of Ignatian prayer — discovering a loving God, putting ourselves and the many things we have and want "in their proper place" as we seek to find God's desires for us, facing sin in the world and in ourselves, and more and more committing ourselves to Jesus Christ.

This is the first year the LightWorks program

has been offered in St. Louis. There are two groups. The group associated with Saint Louis University meets late in the afternoon on Wednesdays. The Francis Xavier (College) Church group meets on Tuesday evenings at Saint Louis University High School.

The program consists of fourteen weeks: four weeks before Advent, seven weeks in the Lenten season, and three weeks after Easter. Each group has about twenty regulars.

LightWorks will be offered again this Fall. LightWorks, White House Retreat, the two Jesuit parishes in the city, the lay-organized Bridges Retreat in Everyday Life, the lay-run Week of Guided Prayer Retreats, and area Christian Life Communities provide many ways for people to learn about and experience Ignatian spirituality.

For those who would like to be informed about future LightWorks programs in St. Louis, please contact me at 314-361-7765, or email at cis@jesuits-mis.org **J**



Father John Callahan