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From Insight to Encounter: The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and the Transformation of the Heart

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FROM INSIGHT TO ENCOUNTER: 
THE IGNATIAN SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART 

Written by 

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ABSTRACT

From Insight to Encounter: The Ignatian Spiritual Exercises and the Transformation of the Heart
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The goal of this project is to help the people of Longview Community Church deepen their ability to encounter and respond to the love of God through participating in an introductory experience of Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. This project explores how the Ignatian practices of reflective meditation on Scripture, imaginative contemplation of Scripture, and the prayer of examen help people not only gain theological insights but also have a transformative encounter with God.

The Spiritual Exercises provides a corrective to the pre-dominant models of discipleship in the contemporary Protestant church, which often focus more on informing minds than transforming hearts. Informational models of discipleship fall short of the New Testament vision of the spiritual life, which calls people into a transformative love relationship with God. Jesus invites people to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and love their neighbors as themselves.

This project culminates in a nine-week spiritual formation experience titled, Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. Encounter consists of an orientation day, daily Ignatian prayer practices, individual spiritual direction, and contemplative sharing groups. The five desired outcomes of the Encounter retreat are to help participants increase their capacity for an experiential encounter with God in Scripture, awareness of God in daily life, openness to God, freedom from unhealthy attachments, and desire to love and serve God.

Overall the Encounter retreat has proven to be effective in helping people grow in their ability to encounter and respond to God. There is evidence to show participants experienced growth in each of the five desired outcomes. The results of this project suggest that an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to form disciples who actively love God and others.

Content Reader: Dr. Thomas Ashbrook

Words: 286
To my sons James, Andrew, and Nathaniel. May you be drawn into the story of Scripture and so discover your identity as one of God’s beloved.
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

In C.S. Lewis’ novel, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Edmund, Lucy, and Eustace are drawn into the world of Narnia through a painting on their uncle’s wall that depicts a ship at sea.\(^1\) While observing the painting, the children find themselves suddenly pulled through the frame into the scene. As they are jostled about on the deck of the ship and feel water splashing against their faces, they discover that they are no longer passive observers to a picture, but have become active participants in its reality. Theologian Bruce Hindmarsh suggests this scene provides a helpful metaphor for the Christian life.\(^2\) He articulates that the purpose of the Christian life is not simply to have a well-framed theology; instead, people must be pulled through the frame and into the story. Following Jesus involves more than gaining accurate conceptual knowledge of God; instead, it involves experiencing and participating in the spiritual realities depicted in Scripture.

Unfortunately, many Christians today often live as passive observers rather than active participants in their relationship with God. Theologian and philosopher Dallas Willard observes, “So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional.”\(^3\) Willard notices many people claim a Christian identity without actually experiencing life as a disciple of Christ. He suggests the church regularly omits the word disciple from Jesus’ Great Commission and replaces it with the word


Whereas Jesus commissions his followers to make disciples who learn “to obey everything I commanded” (Mt 28:19), Willard believes the church often settles on making converts who give intellectual ascent to a series of propositional beliefs. However, there is a significant difference between giving an intellectual ascent to a belief and living out the implications of a belief. Knowing that Jesus offers forgiveness, for example, is different than experiencing the joy and freedom of being forgiven. Memorizing the Ten Commandments is different than learning how to live by them. Tragically, when the Christian life is reduced to gaining proper information, people miss out on experiencing a transformative encounter with God that enables them to live a life of love for God and others.

The following project develops an approach to spiritual formation that seeks to help people move from theoretical observation to active participation in their relationship with God. It explores how the approaches to prayer and scripture meditation in Ignatius of Loyola’s (1491-1556) *Spiritual Exercises* facilitate a transformative encounter with God. The overarching goal of this project is to help the people of Longview Community Church deepen their ability to encounter and respond to the love of God through participating in a spiritual formation experience that introduces them to the forms of prayer outlined in the Ignatian *Exercises*.

To build a foundation for this project, some preliminary issues and concepts are addressed. First, I look at why the church often uses discipleship models that leave people as passive observers rather than active participants in their relationship with God, and

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4 Ibid., 5.

5 All scripture references are drawn from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
point out the negative consequences of these limited models. Second, I introduce the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, and show how they provide a helpful alternative to informational approaches to discipleship. Third, I provide an overview of the desired outcomes and content of the project.

**The Problem**

The predominant models of discipleship in the contemporary Protestant church often focus more on informing minds than transforming lives. As Dallas Willard surveys the models of discipleship in the contemporary church he observes, “At the present time intentional, effective training in Christlikeness—within the framework of a clear-eyed apprenticeship commitment and a spiritual ‘engulfment’ in the Trinitarian reality—is just not there for us.”  

Willard laments the church’s lack of emphasis on helping people not only understand God but have a transformative encounter with God.

Willard suggests there is a theological reason why the church often focuses on information over transformation. He writes:

> History has brought us to the point where the Christian message is thought to be *essentially* concerned *only* with how to deal with sin: with wrongdoing or wrong-being and its effects. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message, or it is included only marginally.

The only thing made essential on the right wing of theology is forgiveness of the individual’s sins.

The key words here are essentially and only. Willard is not discounting the importance of forgiveness of sins. This is a central component of the message of Jesus, but it does not

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7 Ibid., 41. Italics original.
comprise the whole story. Willard argues the biblical narrative presents a broader vision of salvation. He defines the gospel as “the good news of the presence and availability of life in the kingdom, now and forever, through reliance on Jesus the Anointed.”\(^8\) Willard points out that whenever Jesus uses the word “gospel,” it references the in-breaking kingdom of God.\(^9\) The kingdom, Willard says, “is the present, available, direct rule of God offered to humanity in the life of Jesus.”\(^10\) Jesus came to usher in a new way to live and his disciples can now begin to participate in this new reality. The good news is not simply that people go to heaven when they die because they have professed faith in God’s forgiveness. The gospel means that people can live a transformed life in God’s kingdom now. Therefore, when the gospel is reduced to the forgiveness of sins and ignores Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom, a more holistic vision of salvation that addresses the transformation of life is overlooked.\(^11\)

Philosopher James K.A. Smith argues that the contemporary emphasis on information over transformation is also influenced by Cartesian philosophy. He writes:

> In ways that are more “modern” than biblical . . . many of us unwittingly share Rene Descartes’ definition of the essence of the human person as \textit{res cogitans}, a “thinking thing” . . . Such an intellectualist model of the human person—one that reduces us to mere intellect—assumes that learning (and hence discipleship) is primarily a matter of depositing ideas and beliefs into mind containers.\(^12\)

\(^8\) Ibid., 24.

\(^9\) Ibid., 26.

\(^10\) Ibid., 26.

\(^11\) Ibid., 38.

\(^12\) James K.A. Smith, \textit{You are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 3.
If human beings are primarily thinking things, then education is focused primarily on changing how we think. Smith goes on to say the appropriation of the “intellectualist model of the human person,” has created an approach to discipleship that “narrowly focuses on filling our intellectual wells with biblical knowledge, convinced that we can think our way to holiness—it is sanctification by information transfer.”

An informational approach to discipleship is incomplete. James Smith writes, “We don’t need less than knowledge; we need more.” Becoming a disciple certainly involves the mind, but it also needs to engage a person’s heart. When asked to sum up the core of the spiritual life Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27). Here, Jesus presents a holistic picture of discipleship, which touches all aspects of the human person. Furthermore, Jesus depicts the spiritual life as a love relationship with God. God is not a concept to be understood, but a person with whom people are invited into relationship. In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul says the fruit of this relationship with God produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. This list suggests that an encounter with God is not only meant to transform the mind but also one’s emotions, experiences, and behaviors. Peace and joy are not intellectual concepts but affective experiences. Patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control speak of transformed motivations and behavior. Therefore, being a Christian cannot be limited to

13 Ibid., 4. Here Smith notes the irony that the ‘intellectualist’ approach to discipleship also pervades anti-intellectual expressions of fundamentalism.

14 Ibid., 6.
professing accurate views of God; rather, it involves experiencing God and living out the implications of this encounter.

An informational approach to discipleship has a negative effect on the spiritual health of Christ followers. Spiritual director Janet Ruffing observes that Christians often experience a gap between their espoused theology and their operative theology.\textsuperscript{15} While Christians might give intellectual assent to the doctrines of the church, they often operate as if these doctrines are not actually true. When this rupture of intellectual belief and operative faith occurs, Christians miss out on experiencing the fullness of what the scriptures claim. For example, Parker Palmer observes that many Christian leaders operate as “functional atheists.”\textsuperscript{16} While leaders may say that God is all-powerful, they often function as if they are the ones who are ultimately responsible. Dallas Willard summarizes what is at stake when people have an intellectual understanding of God but do not live as active disciples. He writes:

\begin{quote}
Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God’s overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, nondiscipleship costs you exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring (John 10:10).\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

If discipleship is solely focused on gaining accurate information about God, people miss out on experiencing the fullness of God’s hope, love, purpose, and peace.

Approaches to discipleship that emphasize information over transformation also negatively impact the church’s mission and witness in the world. In their book

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Janet Ruffing, \textit{Spiritual Direction Beyond the Beginnings}, (New York: Paulist, 2000), 60.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Parker Palmer, \textit{Let Your Life Speak}, (San Francisco: John Wiley, 2000), 88.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Dallas Willard, \textit{The Great Omission}, 9.
\end{itemize}
UnChristian, Dan Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons note that 85 percent of non-Christian millennials characterize the Christians they encounter as hypocritical.\textsuperscript{18} The gap that many Christians experience between what they profess to believe and how they actually live is being noticed. Thus, helping people bring into alignment their theology and their lived experience is vital if the church hopes to restore the credibility of its witness in the world.

To summarize, the main problem this project addresses is that the predominant models of discipleship in the contemporary Protestant church often focus more on informing minds than transforming lives. These approaches to discipleship overlook a more holistic view of the Christian life, which invites people to not only know God but to encounter God and live out the implications of this encounter. Informational approaches to discipleship prevent people from experiencing the fullness of life with God and negatively impact the church’s witness in the world.

**Proposal Solution**

In response to the deficits of informational approaches to discipleship, the contemporary church has developed a renewed interest in spiritual formation in recent years.\textsuperscript{19} Spiritual formation is a term that is often used in place of the term discipleship to emphasize that the purpose of the Christian life is to experience transformation. In 2009 an ecumenical group of spiritual formation leaders developed a common definition of the term which states: “Christian spiritual formation is the process of being shaped by the


\textsuperscript{19} Willard, The Great Omission, 69.
Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, filled with love for God and the world.” This definition explains both the purpose and the process of spiritual formation. The purpose of spiritual formation is to form people who are becoming more like Christ. The process of formation happens not by human effort, but through a sustained transformative encounter with God. It is the Holy Spirit that is the ultimate source of transformation.

Spiritual formation happens as people connect with or “keep in step” (Gal 5:16) with the spirit.

This project develops an approach to spiritual formation that draws on Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The Exercises helps people engage the biblical story in a way that not only informs the mind but inspires a deeper commitment to love and follow God. Ignatian scholar James Wakefield writes:

> The *Spiritual Exercises* are an invitation to renew and deepen our relationship with Christ. They are not a call to intellectual gymnastics, and they do not teach a set of theological propositions. The *Spiritual Exercises* are primarily a series of meditations on the Gospels that help us clarify and deepen our commitments to Jesus Christ.²¹

The purpose of the Exercises is not to provide increased information but to facilitate a renewed commitment to follow Christ. Ignatius writes, “The structure of these exercises has the purpose of leading a person to true spiritual freedom. We grow into this freedom by gradually bringing an order of values into our lives so that we find that at the moment

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of choice or decisions we are not swayed by any disordered love.”\textsuperscript{22} The \textit{Exercises} seeks to help people discover freedom from unhealthy attachments to the world, so they are free to whole-heartedly follow Christ. Ignatius uses the word attachments to describe relationships with people or things from which people seek to meet needs that can be met only in God. The meditation process in the \textit{Exercises} facilitates the reorientation of the human heart from attachments to this world to an attachment to God. People encounter Jesus and his transforming power through slow meditative reading of scripture, praying with the imagination, and prayerfully reflecting on their experience.

My interest in the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} originates in my own experience of going through the \textit{Exercises} over the course of a ten-month period during the years of 2016-2017. The \textit{Exercises} facilitated a profound experiential encounter with the love of God that created a renewed openness to God’s movement in my life and an increased desire to love and serve God. The \textit{Exercises} did not simply leave me with new insights into the spiritual life, they facilitated an encounter with God that inspired me to engage in ministry with a renewed hope and trust in God. My experience with the \textit{Exercises} instilled a desire to share this approach to spiritual formation with the members of Longview Community Church, where I serve as the associate pastor.

\textbf{Desired Outcomes}

This project culminates in a nine-week introductory experience of the Ignatian \textit{Exercises} titled, Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. As noted above,\textsuperscript{22} David Fleming, \textit{Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises: A Literal Translation and Contemporary Reading}, (Saint Louis, MO: Institute for Jesuit Studies, 1996), 27. All references to the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} are drawn from David Fleming’s contemporary translation unless otherwise noted.
the overarching goal of this project is to help the people of Longview Community Church deepen their ability to encounter and respond to the love of God as they engage with the prayer practices of the *Exercises*. These goals of encountering and responding to God can be further expanded into five desired outcomes, which are drawn from Ignatius’ opening reflections in his *Exercises*.

First, Ignatius seeks to facilitate an increased capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture. For example, he writes that the goal in prayer “is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly.” Ignatius also encourages people to pay close attention not only to the ideas they encounter in scripture but the “response of the heart.” Ignatius invites people to pray with the scriptures in such a way that they not only think about ideas but also get in touch with how the scriptures effect them personally.

Second, Ignatius seeks to help people encounter God in their everyday experience. In his Principle and Foundation, his vision statement for the spiritual life in the *Exercises*, he writes, “All the things in this world are also created because of God’s love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily.” Ignatius seeks to help people discover God not only in scripture but also in the world.

23 These desired outcomes are described in more depth in chapter six.


25 Ibid., 7.

26 Ibid., 5.
Third, Ignatius seeks to foster an increased openness to God. In his opening annotation he states, “What we call spiritual exercises are good for increasing openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.” Ignatius facilitates an increased openness to God by inviting people to develop a renewed trust in the goodness and love of God as they meditate on the gospels.

Fourth, Ignatius seeks to help people discover freedom from a disordered love of worldly things. In his Principle and Foundation, he writes:

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success of failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”

Ignatius seeks to help people discover freedom from bondage to things like wealth, fear of failure, and anxiety over life’s circumstances, as they discover a desire to follow Christ.

Fifth, Ignatius seeks to facilitate an increased desire to respond to experiences of intimacy with God by actively loving and serving God through missional engagement in the world. He writes that one of the purposes of the Exercises is “for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.”

Throughout the Exercises, Ignatius seeks help people respond to the love of God. He invites people to discern the specific ways God is calling them into deeper levels of devotion and service.

27 Ibid., 5.
28 Ibid., 23.
29 Ibid., 5.
Overview of the Project

This project is divided into three main sections. Chapter one and two make up the first section and explore how an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation engages both the community and church context where the project is being implemented. Chapter one looks specifically at the community context. It describes the religious landscape of the Pacific Northwest, where many people indicate an increasing skepticism toward institutional religion but maintain an enduring interest in spiritual experience.30 This chapter proposes that the Ignatian approach to formation can help to form credible witnesses in a skeptical culture. It also explores how the Ignatian emphasis on spiritual experience connects with the spiritual longings of people in this religious landscape. This chapter also examines the socio-economic challenges of Cowlitz County and explores how an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to inspire and motivate compassionate service in a struggling community.

Chapter two explores the obstacles and opportunities with implementing the Exercises at Longview Community Church (LCC). It looks at how the Ignatian Exercises intersect the history and theology, vision, mission and values, expressed needs, demographics, and current discipleship ministries at LCC. This chapter points out the ways in which Ignatian spiritual formation currently aligns with the culture at LCC and explores how the areas of divergence can be overcome through proper contextualization.

Chapters three, four, and five make up part two of the project. This section presents a theological vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in the local church. Chapter three reviews numerous relevant theological resources that engage the theme of Ignatian spiritual formation. Chapter four explores how the Ignatian Exercises might support the churches ability to living out its calling to form disciples who engage in mission. Chapter five looks at how the forms of prayer outlined in the Exercises facilitate a transformative encounter with God, which helps to reorient the desires and commitments of the heart.

Chapters six and seven make up part three of the project. This section provides an overview of a nine-week experience with the Ignatian Exercises. Chapter six describes the content and goals of Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. Chapter seven describes the implementation, evaluation methods, and outcomes of the ministry initiative.

**Conclusion**

This project develops a spiritual formation experience that introduces the people of Longview Community Church to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises provides an approach to spiritual formation that not only changes people’s minds but also reorients the desires and commitments of their hearts. This approach to spiritual formation provides a helpful corrective to discipleship models that focus more on informing minds instead of transforming hearts. Informational models of formation fall short of the biblical vision of the spiritual life, prevent people from experiencing the fullness of life with God, and negatively impact the church’s witness in the world. The
The goal of this project is to help people encounter and respond to the love of God as they engage in the forms of prayer outlined in Ignatius *Exercises.* The hope is that this experience will bring about an increased experience of God in scripture and everyday life, openness, freedom, and desire to love and serve God in practical ways as part of the mission of the church. Having introduced the project, I now explore the context where this ministry initiative is implemented.
CHAPTER ONE
THE EXERCISES AND MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

As noted in the introduction, the goal of this project is to help the people of Longview Community Church encounter and respond to the love of God by participating in a spiritual formation experience that introduces them to Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. The five desired outcomes of this project are to help participants increase their capacity for an experiential encounter with God in Scripture, awareness of God in daily life, openness to God, freedom from unhealthy attachments, and desire to love and serve God. This chapter explores how these desired outcomes support the challenges of doing ministry in the Longview, Washington area.

There are two main sections to this chapter. The first section looks at the religious landscape of the Pacific Northwest. The Pacific Northwest has a growing number of people who are distrustful of religious institutions; yet, maintain a deep interest in spiritual experiences.¹ This chapter argues that the Ignatian emphasis on experiencing

¹ Mark Shibley, “Secular But Spiritual In the Pacific Northwest,” in Religion & Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone, eds. Patricia O’Connell Killen and Mark Silk, (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 139.
God in scripture and finding God in daily life has the potential to help the church engage this religious landscape.

The second section explores the socioeconomic challenges of the local county where Longview is situated. While Cowlitz County has the same level of religious affiliation as the Pacific Northwest, it deals with a number of socioeconomic challenges that are unique as compared with the state as a whole. Overall, Cowlitz County ranks thirty-one out of the thirty-nine counties of Washington State in overall quality of life. This chapter argues that the *Exercises*’ emphasis on abiding in God’s love, spiritual freedom, finding God in all things, and discernment, has the potential to inspire and motivate people to engage in compassionate service in this struggling region.

**Spirituality in the “None Zone”**

The Pacific Northwest is one of the most un-churched regions in America. The Pew Research Forum ranks Washington State as the forty-fourth most religious state in the country. In Washington, 32 percent of the population considers themselves religiously unaffiliated, which is significantly higher than the national average of 21.3 percent. Washington State has the third highest amount of religiously unaffiliated people

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by state, with only Vermont and New Hampshire showing a higher percentage. This subset of people is often referred to as the ‘religious nones,’ because they choose the label ‘none’ when asked about their religious affiliation.

Along with the ‘religious nones,’ are numerous people who claim a religious identity but have little to no connection with a religious institution. In Washington State, only 30 percent attend religious services on a weekly basis. Sociologist Mark Shilbey notes that 63 percent of the residents of Washington and Oregon are not affiliated with any religious congregation. This statewide trend matches the statistics of Cowlitz County.

While people in the Pacific Northwest are less inclined to claim affiliation to an official religion or participate in a religious institution, they still indicate a strong interest in spiritual issues. For example, 77 percent of Washingtonians claim to be either certain or fairly certain that they believe in God, 59 percent pray at least weekly, 59 percent say they experience spiritual peace or well-being at least once a month, and 65 percent say they feel a sense of wonder about the universe at least once or twice a month. Even the

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7 Ibid.


‘religious none’ subset, shows an interest in spirituality. For example, 44 percent of ‘religious nones’ in Washington are either certain or fairly certain they believe in God, and 62 percent indicate they experience feelings of wonder about the universe at least once or twice a month.\textsuperscript{12}

Many people in the Pacific Northwest, then, are interested in spirituality but not in institutional religion. Mark Shibley explains the distinction between spirituality and religion by defining spirituality as “direct, personal experience with the sacred,” and religion as “mediated, institutionalized experience with the sacred.”\textsuperscript{13} While numerous Pacific Northwesterners believe in God, pray, and report having spiritual experiences, a significant percentage of them do not looking to religious institutions to experience God or help them define or determine their beliefs.

One reason why people in the Pacific Northwest may favor direct personal experiences over institutional religion is because they indicate distrust in religious institutions. Sociologist Andrew Grenville observes that distrust towards religious institutions is much higher in the Cascadia region, which includes British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, as compared to the rest of North America. He reports,

Cascadians are more likely to have “not very much” trust or absolutely “none at all” in organized religion, with 50 percent versus 33 percent in the “Rest of North America” (RoNA). \textellipsis are less likely to agree that “the Bible is the inspired Word of God” (69 percent Cascadians versus 82 percent, RoNA) \textellipsis are more likely to strongly agree that “You don’t need to go to church in order to be a good Christian” (53 percent versus 44 percent, RoNA) \textellipsis and are more likely to never attend church or go just once a year or so (51 percent versus 29 percent, RoNA).\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13} Mark Shibley, “Secular But Spiritual In the Pacific Northwest,” 139.

Pacific Northwesterners indicate a strong distrust in religious institutions; therefore, they are less likely to look to the church for spiritual guidance and feel freer to determine their beliefs personally.

The growing distrust in religious institutions is rooted in the broader cultural shifts of postmodern philosophy and globalization, typical in the Pacific Northwest. Postmodernism is a philosophical movement of the late twentieth century that questions the validity of absolute truth claims. The movement is “characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason and an acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power.”15 While the Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century believed in the possibility of arriving at absolute truth through reason and science, postmodern philosophers disagree. Postmodernism questions the validity of making absolute truth claims on the grounds that beliefs are highly influenced by a person’s social context. Globalization has contributed to this idea that truth is subjective. Ignatian scholar Tim Muldoon observes:

In the postmodern, global context, the practice of Christian faith is a deliberative choice of a kind quite different from anything faced by earlier generations. The phenomenon of globalization confronts us with the realities that Christian faith is certainly not the only religious option available to us, and that Christians constitute only a minority of the world’s population. 16

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As diverse worldviews, traditions, and philosophies coexist together, the consensus that previous generations experienced in regards to truth no longer exists. Postmodernism and globalism create a context where people have more choice around religious beliefs, and religious institutions no longer hold the authority they once had. In the absence of institutional authority, postmodern people increasingly look to their own experience to determine what is true. As Muldoon concludes, “If postmodernity involves questions about the possibility of religious authority, it is no surprise that there has arisen in recent decades an interest in religious ‘experience.’ For, in the absence of trust, people must rely on their own faculties.”

Sociologist Mark Shibley suggests the distrust of religious institutions and the subsequent privatization of spirituality are amplified the Pacific Northwest due to its religious history and immigration patterns. He writes:

The institutional power of religion is weakest in the West because there is no history of a dominant religious tradition, only pluralism created by successive waves of immigration and cultural diffusion. Because mobility has loosened them from ascriptive social ties, individuals in the West are freer than elsewhere to choose their religion, or whether to be religious at all.

Shebley continues, “Nones are the largest ‘religious’ group in the region. In New England there are more than twice as many Catholics as there are Nones, and in the South there are more than four times as many conservative Protestants as there are Nones . . . because Northwesterners are less tied to traditional religion they are freer to explore alternative spirituality.”

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17 Ibid., 91.
18 Shibley, “Secular But Spiritual In the Pacific Northwest,” 139.
19 Ibid., 140.
increased mobility and immigration in the Pacific Northwest have created a cultural context that is much more pluralistic than in other parts of the nation. This decreases the influence of religious institutions and increases people’s spiritual autonomy.

The Ignatian Exercises and Missional Engagement in the 'None Zone’

Having described the spiritual landscape of the Pacific Northwest, I now look at how the Ignatian Exercises might help the church engage this landscape. First, I suggest the Exercises has the potential to help Christians integrate what they believe with how they live, which can increase the credibility of their witness in a skeptical culture. Second, I suggest the Ignatian emphasis on spiritual experience is relevant to the spiritual longings of postmodern people in the Northwest, and may help them engage the Christian tradition.

In his autobiography, Ignatius notices that his personal experience of God impacts his public witness. Writing in the third person, Ignatius says, “When Ignatius spoke about God and the things of God, he not only did so with sincerity and conviction, but it was evident to the people that he himself had experienced God, and the flames that had engulfed his heart also ignited theirs.”

Ignatius’ own engagement with the prayer practices he developed, facilitated a genuine personal encounter with God. This personal experience of God was evident to others, and brought level of credibility and power to his public witness.

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Forming credible witnesses is particularly important when seeking to reach out to a culture that is skeptical of the church. Since many people in the Pacific Northwest are reticent to come to church, it is important for Christians to authentically live out their faith in the community. Unfortunately, there is a significant credibility gap among Christians in the broader culture. As the Barna Group reports, “A decade ago the vast majority of Americans outside the Christian faith, including young people, felt favorably toward Christianity’s role in society. Currently, however, just 16 percent of non-Christians in their late teens and twenties said they have a “good impression” of Christianity.” They also report that 85 percent of un-churched millennials characterize Christians as hypocritical and 87 percent characterize Christians as judgmental. Missiologist George Hunter also picks up on the lack of credibility Christians have in secular culture. He writes:

My interview research with secular people has confirmed the prominence of the ‘credibility’ theme in secular people’s inquiries about Christianity. Some people wonder whether we really believe what we say we believe. Some people do not doubt that we believe it; they wonder whether we live by it. Some people do not doubt that we believe it or live by it; they wonder whether it makes much difference.

As Hunter interviews secular people he notices a common response—Christians are regularly perceived as being inauthentic in their faith. There is a gap between what Christians profess to believe and how they actually live their life.


22 Ibid.

By emphasizing the importance of spiritual experience, Ignatius seeks to bring into congruence a Christian’s profession of faith with the experience of faith. Congruence proves vital if Christians are to make a credible case for the gospel. Ralph Waldo Emerson observes, “The reason why anyone refuses his assent to your opinion, or his aid to your benevolent design, is in you. He refuses to accept you as a bringer of truth, because, though you think you have it, he feels that you have it not. You have not given him the authentic sign.”

For the church to gain a hearing and rebuild trust with a culture skeptical of its beliefs and traditions, it must help people cultivate an authentic faith that is supported by a direct personal encounter with God.

Along with helping to form credible witnesses, the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation also might help the church engage a post-Christian context by providing a spirituality that may be attractive to postmodern spiritual seekers. While helping seekers engage the Ignatian tradition lies outside the scope of this particular project, it is worth noting the possibilities that Ignatian prayer has for reaching postmodern people. As explained above, postmodern people value personal spiritual experience above institutionally mediated beliefs. Ignatius promotes approaches to prayer in his *Exercises* that seek to facilitate an experiential encounter with God in scripture. Through slow meditative reflection or imaginative contemplation, people focus not only on the ideas they encounter in scripture but what they are experiencing as they engage scripture. Ignatius states that the purpose of scripture meditation is not “knowing much, but

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24 Quoted in Ibid., 57.

25 The nature of Ignatian prayer and meditation is described in greater detail in chapter 5.
realizing and relishing things interiorly.”

Tim Muldoon asserts these approaches to meditation provide plausible entrance points to scripture for postmodern people. He writes, “For those immersed in a thoroughly pluralist world, any spiritual practice that is predicated on obedience to doctrinal claims is unlikely to be persuasive. By contrast, Ignatian spirituality offers a ‘user-friendly’ way into the life of prayer, which appeals to the uncertain.” He goes on to explain:

The postmodern person who is wary of arrogant claims to authority and truth can, in good conscience, accept an invitation to exercise imagination. Whereas the more traditional models of mission often assumed the superiority of Christian doctrine, the invitation to imaginative play makes no such claims. Instead, it proposes that the language and conceptual apparatus of Christian tradition can provide a story through which to explore the relationship between God and a person on an individual level.

Here Muldoon argues that the Ignatian approach to prayer and meditation has the potential to offer a safe inroad to the Christian tradition in a context where the locus of authority has shifted from doctrinal claims to personal experience. Ignatius does not impose a doctrinal statement on people but invites people to reflect on how they are experiencing God in scripture. Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner argues this is the intent of Ignatius’ *Exercises*, writing, “The Exercises are not the abstract indoctrination of a theoretical doctrinal system . . . but an initiation into man’s religious experience and

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28 Ibid., 96.
sanctification from within.”

The Ignatian method of scripture meditation does not require people to start with a fully formed theological belief system; instead it helps people develop their beliefs as they experience God personally.

Actor Andrew Garfield illustrates how the Ignatian approach to prayer helps people discover faith through an experiential encounter with God in scripture. Garfield went through the Exercises in preparation for his role as a Jesuit priest in Martin Scorsese’s film Silence in 2016. Garfield was a skeptic and non-believer before embarking on the Exercises but emerged with a deep love for Jesus. In an interview with Jesuit priest Brendan Busse, Garfield says, “What was really easy was falling in love with this person, was falling in love with Jesus Christ. That was the most surprising thing.”

After Garfield reflected on this experience, Busse observed, “He fell silent at the thought of it, clearly moved to emotion. He clutched his chest, just below the sternum . . . and what he said next came out through bursts of laughter: ‘God! That was the most remarkable thing—falling in love, and how easy it was to fall in love with Jesus.’” Garfield’s continued experience of God through practicing Ignatian meditation helps him discover Jesus on a deeply personal level. His description of this experience shows the depth of passion he has discovered for Jesus through his engagement with the Exercises.

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31 Ibid.
Some churches may be concerned that Ignatius promotes an inappropriate shift from the authority of scripture to personal spiritual experience. To be sure, Ignatius’ emphasis on spiritual experience does not usurp the authority of scripture. The Exercises are thoroughly rooted in scripture and orthodox theology. Personal experience is elevated but it is anchored in biblical reflection. As the Jesuit writer Kevin O’Brien comments, “The genius and beauty of the Exercises is that we learn to weave our own life narrative into the life story of Jesus Christ in such a way that both become more vivid and interconnected.”\textsuperscript{32} O’Brien observes that as people engage in the scripture through Ignatian meditation, the scriptures come to life for them and connects with their experience. Andrew Garfield’s experience speaks to this. As he encounters the scriptures experientially he develops a trust in what the scriptures claim about Jesus.

While Ignatius helps people experience God in scripture, he also helps people experience God in their everyday life. Another form of prayer that he teaches in the Exercises is the prayer of examen, which is an invitation to prayerfully review the day. Through the prayer of examen, Ignatius invites people to notice how God is present in their experiences.

Jesuit priest James Martin observes that the prayer of examen connects with the longings of postmodern spiritual seekers. He writes, “The daily examen can be of special help to seekers, agnostics, and atheists.” This observation is derived from his own experience leading non-believers through this prayer practice. He writes, “A few years ago, I started to lead large groups in this prayer. Most were familiar with Christian

spirituality. But even people who had never prayed before were enthusiastic about the examen.”

Martin notices people are often more convinced about the reality of God when they discover God in their own experience than when they reflect on complex philosophical arguments. He writes, “The examen helps you to ‘realize’ the presence of God. For me, it transcends any proofs for the existence of God by asking you to notice where God already exists in your life.”

Like, Ignatian meditation on scripture, then, the Ignatian prayer of examen has the potential to intersect with postmodern people in that it helps them discover God at an experiential level.

So far I have explored how the Ignatian Exercises connect with the postmodern religious landscape of the Pacific Northwest. It has been shown that the Pacific Northwest is made up of a majority of people who are interested in personal spiritual experiences but are increasingly skeptical of religious institutions. The privatization of spirituality and the distrust in religious institutions are rooted in postmodernism, and globalization—both of which are amplified in the Pacific Northwest due to its immigration patterns and religious history. The Ignatian emphasis on spiritual experience has the potential to form credible witnesses in a skeptical culture by bringing into alignment what Christians profess to believe and what they are encountering experientially. The Ignatian emphasis on spiritual experience also has the potential to help postmodern people connect with the Christian tradition.

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34 Ibid., 102.
The Socioeconomic Challenges in Cowlitz County

Having explored the religious landscape of the Pacific Northwest, I now look at the socioeconomic challenges of Cowlitz County and explore how the Ignatian Exercises might help believers engage a struggling community with compassionate service. Cowlitz County deals with a number of socioeconomic challenges that are unique as compared with the state as a whole. Overall, Cowlitz County ranks thirty-one out of the thirty-nine counties of Washington State in overall quality of life, and twenty-eight out of thirty-nine in socioeconomic well being.35

Poverty is a major issue in the county. Unemployment has consistently been 2 to 3 percent higher than the rest of the state for the past decade,36 22.3 percent of families are living at or below the poverty line as compared to 14.6 percent in all of Washington,37 13.6 percent of children are receiving temporary assistance for needy families compared to 6.2 percent in Washington State. Overall, 24.2 percent of children and adolescents under the age of eighteen are living in poverty, as are 51 percent of female head of households with children. The economic recession that began in 2008 had a major impact on this area, in large part because the economy is heavily focused on manufacturing. The Cowlitz County Report Card explains, “With the last recession manufacturing took a


major hit and has slowly rebounded, but there are still 1,100 jobs that disappeared due to either automation, increased production, or other economic factors.”

As in many other locales, there is a strong correlation between poverty rates and education levels in Cowlitz County. The annual median earning for Cowlitz County adults with a college education is 49,043 dollars compared to 27,297 dollars for those with a high school diploma. Only 15.6 percent of adults in Cowlitz County have a college degree as compared to 31.9 percent in Washington State. This can partially be explained by the main industries in the area. The Cowlitz County Report Card explains, “The backbone of the economy for many years has been manufacturing, timber and construction.” These industries often do not require higher education in order to get hired. While historically it has been easier to find employment in these industries, there are currently less openings for family wage jobs.

Crime and drug use is also a problem in the region. In the city of Longview there were 156 crimes per 1,000 people in 2017 compared to 63.9 crimes per 1,000 people in Washington State. In Cowlitz County there were 2.8 violent crimes per 1,000 youth compared to 1.6 per 1,000 in Washington State, and 8.8 reported domestic violence offenses per 1,000 persons compared to 7.4 percent in the rest of the state. The rate of

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drug law violations in Cowlitz County show an even starker contrast compared the rest of the state. In 2015 there were 6.7 arrests for drug law violations per 1,000 adults compared to 2.2 per 1000 adults in Washington State. Cowlitz County also has the highest drug overdose death rate in the State of Washington.\(^{43}\)

While these statistics taken together as a whole seem daunting, there is an opportunity for real engagement in Christ’s work of redemption. Faithful ministry in Cowlitz County must embrace people facing these very real struggles. Effective spiritual formation initiatives must inspire compassionate engagement with those in need.

**The Ignatian Exercises and Compassionate Service**

At first glance, it might seem as if the Ignatian *Exercises* have little connection to compassionate service. After all, the primary focus of the *Exercises* is helping people have a transformative encounter with God in prayer. However, this section argues the *Exercises* support compassionate service by helping people discover motivation to love others as they abide in the love of God, freedom from attachments, awareness of God in everyday life, and clarity as they learn how to discern God’s leading in their life.

The first way that the *Exercises* support compassionate service is by inviting people to abide in the love of God. In the opening annotation of the *Exercises*, Ignatius says that the main goal is “for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond


ever more faithfully to the love of God.” Throughout the *Exercises* Ignatius invites people to meditate and reflect on the love of Jesus in the gospels. Jesuit priest Kevin O’Brien suggests that this continued abiding in the gospel narratives “invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ.” Here O’Brien suggests that a growing intimacy with God translates into transformed behavior. As people spend time with Jesus they begin to think and act like Jesus.

Jesus emphasizes how abiding in the love of God facilitates transformation in John 15:4-6, where he says that people who continually abide in his love bear good fruit in the world. He says, “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” This idea is reaffirmed in 1 John 4, where it says, “We love because He first loved us.” These verses make clear that people’s ability to selflessly and compassionately love others is contingent on them being transformed by their encounter with God’s love.

Former Jesuit provincial Pedro Arrupe makes a helpful connection between people’s deepening love relationship with God and their capacity for practical service in the world. He writes:

> Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom

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you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.  

Arrupe articulates the practical outcome of experiencing a deepening love for God. What people love ultimately shapes and directs their lives. When people are fully captured by the love of God it will influence how they spend their time, who they care about, and what they live for. Through a sustained abiding in the love of God, people’s hearts are shaped to desire the values of the kingdom of God. These desires in turn shape the choices they make in the world.

The *Exercises* also helps people discover the spiritual freedom necessary for compassionate service in the world. A deepening intimacy with God experienced in the *Exercises* enables people to discover freedom from their disarming attachments to things such as comfort, success, results, or the affirmation of others. Ignatius casts this vision of spiritual freedom in his Principle and Foundation saying, “We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life of a short one . . . Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.” In the second movement of the *Exercises*, Ignatius invites people to evaluate their motives. He describes three types of people that have varying degrees of freedom from attachments. He invites people to evaluate whether they can honestly say, “I would like to be rid of any attachment which gets in the way of God’s invitation to a more abundant life . . . I want to be at a point of balance so that I

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46 Fleming, *Spiritual Exercises*, 27.
can easily move in the direction of God’s call.”

“...The graced desire to be better able to serve God becomes clearly the motivating factor for accepting or letting go of anything.” The Exercises can become an opportunity for God to purify people’s hearts, removing barriers to loving God and neighbor. Ignatius’ seeks to help people come to a place where their ultimate motivation is to love God and others without restraint. At the very end of the Exercises, Ignatius invites people to pray, “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.” By the time a person comes to the conclusion of the Exercises, Ignatius hopes they are at a place where their attachment to God enables them to be free from their attachments to the world.

Freedom from attachments provides an essential foundation for compassionate service in the world. In 1 Corinthians 13 the Apostle Paul writes, “If I give all I possess to the poor . . . but not have love, I gain nothing.” Paul suggests it is possible to engage in radical acts of service that are devoid of love. Spiritual formation writer Richard Foster expands on this idea in his book Celebration of Discipline, in which he describes the difference between self-righteous service and true service. He describes self-righteous

47 Ibid., 117.
48 Ibid., 119.
49 Ibid., 177.
service as concerned with results, motivated by external rewards, insensitive, temporary, and affected by a person’s moods and whims. Self-righteous service is ultimately motivated by the need for recognition or personal gain. Foster contrasts this with true loving service, which does not distinguish between big and small acts, is content in hiddenness, is not overly concerned with results, sees service as a lifestyle, and listens before acting.

By helping people discover a healthy detachment from things like recognition and external rewards, the Exercises has the potential to help people engage in true service towards others that is motivated by love. Jesuit activist Gary Smith illustrates how the journey of freedom from attachments forms a foundation by which people can freely respond to God’s call to truly love and serve others. In his book, Radical Compassion, he documents his experience of living and working with the impoverished people in Portland, Oregon. One of his reflections illustrates what service looks like when it is properly detached from the need to be successful or produce results. Smith tells the story of a long-term relationship he develops with a drug addict named Melinda, who had relapsed numerous times. Smith writes, “I don’t have any illusions about Melinda’s chances. The recidivism rate of addicts is statistically very high, as is the rate of premature deaths of addicts. So I am not kidding myself. But stats don’t drive one’s life of service down here. Love does.” The driving motivation for Smith is not success but

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
love, which enables him to stick with Melinda despite the possibility of failure. In another reflection Smith speaks of a fellow outreach worker named Shea who reminds him, “As a ministry we are more than money managers; . . . we are family—a family of friends—which most of our members never had. We understand that real care for the poor and the little people of the world means being in love for the long haul.”

Love enables Smith and his fellow outreach workers to stick with people for the long haul, even though it may be costly. Smith’s formation in the Ignatian tradition has equipped him to engage with the poor in a costly, relational, and loving way.

The third way the Exercises supports compassionate outreach is by helping people develop a more loving posture to the world by participating in reflective prayer. The prayer of examen invites people to notice God in their everyday experience, and notice when they are out of step with God. Ignatian scholar Timothy Gallagher argues that the insights gained through the prayer of examen can help people relate to others in a loving way. For example, one of the women he interviews for his book on the examen comments, “Without the examen, I would just be reacting and not responding throughout the day.”

By prayerfully reviewing the day in prayer, this woman develops a deeper awareness of how she is relating to people. She begins to notice how she is reacting negatively toward others and her prayerful awareness enables her to respond more lovingly. The examen, therefore, invites people to have a reflective prayerful posture towards life and relationships, which can shape how they respond to others. Gallagher

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54 Ibid., 106.

articulates, “Examen is not some unhealthy individualistic interiority. Its focus is no less than God’s desire for a renewed and reconciled universe of interpersonal relationships.”

Ignatian scholar and pastor Trevor Hudson agrees that prayerfully reflecting on daily experience can help people respond to the world in more compassionate ways. In his book, *A Mile in My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion*, Hudson leads people on intentional pilgrimages to impoverished parts of South Africa. He invites these pilgrims to regularly pray the prayer of examen so that they can learn from their experiences. Through this intentional reflection people develop a deeper sense of compassion for those they encounter. He writes,

> As people reflect upon their encounters with suffering neighbors and become more aware of their inner responses, they uncover insights that can change their lives. Moreover, the practice of reflection fine-tunes their antennae to hear God speaking to them through the ‘human cries’ around them, a kind of listening that often lays the basis for future actions of compassionate ministry and mission.

The work of the Holy Spirit through the examen prayer has the potential to cultivate a loving posture toward others. Through this greater self-awareness and humility, people become more aware of how they are relating to the world, and can cultivate a deeper awareness of how to lovingly respond to those around them.

The fourth way that the *Exercises* can support compassionate service in society is by helping people discern God’s leading in their everyday circumstances. In the *Exercises*, Ignatius provides a set of rules for discernment. Central to Ignatius’ understanding of discernment is his emphasis on the role that the interior movements of

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56 Ibid., intro., Kindle.

consolation and desolation play in understanding God’s leading. Ignatius believes the Holy Spirit communicates to people through experiences of consolation, which he defines as “every increase of hope, faith and charity, and all interior joy, which calls us to heavenly things, giving us peace in our Creator and Lord.”\textsuperscript{58} Ignatius teaches that the Holy Spirit produces consolation and therefore a sign that one’s decision is in sync with the Lord’s movement.

Ignatius defines desolation as the opposite of consolation—a, “prevailing love for things low and earthly, the unquiet of different temptations, lack of confidence in God, when we love not God, when we find ourselves all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from our Creator and Lord.”\textsuperscript{59} Desolation, according to Ignatius, never comes from God, but from a person’s own sin and diversion from the Lord’s path. Therefore, Ignatius says that if people are experiencing desolation they are not experiencing the movement of the Spirit.

Ignatius promotes a holistic form of discernment that blends both the mind and heart. Within the \textit{Exercises}, one becomes attentive both to what they think and to what they feel or sense within them. As Wilkie and Noreen Cannon Au articulate, “Holistic discernment invites us to put our whole self into the process. A holistic approach is inclusive and takes seriously the knowledge-bearing capacity not only of the mind but also of the body, emotions, senses, imagination, and feelings.”\textsuperscript{60} People become aware of

\textsuperscript{58} Wakefield, \textit{Sacred Listening: Discovering The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), appendix 1, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., part. 2, Kindle.

God’s movement within and around them by paying attention to the holistic awareness of His presence.

Ignatius’ emphasis on discernment suggests that one of the main goals of the Exercises is to help people live out their faith in practical ways. James Martin points out that the original title of the Exercises was, “Spiritual Exercises to Overcome Oneself, and to Order One’s Life, Without Reaching a Decision Through Some Disordered Affection.” This awkwardly written title suggests that one of Ignatius’ main goals in developing the Exercises was to help people discern God’s call on their life. As people are transformed by abiding in the love of God, and freed from disordered affections, they become able to discern how they might serve God.

While Jesus calls people to love God and neighbor, knowing what that means in the particular can be very difficult. Throughout the Exercises Ignatius constantly invites people to consider how they might respond to God’s love in practical acts of service. He regularly uses the Spanish word ayudar, meaning “to help.” Ignatius encourages people to discover ways to practically help souls. In one of Ignatius’ meditations titled ‘The Call of the King,’ he asks people to imagine Jesus inviting them to join him on a mission to eradicate injustice. He writes,

It is my will to rid all lands of injustice and bring them real peace. Therefore, all who would like to come with me are to be content to eat as I, and also to drink and dress . . . as I; likewise they are to labor like me in the day and watch in the night . . . that so afterward they may have part with me in the victory as they have had it in the labors.” How does his subject respond? 

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63 Wakefield, Sacred Listening, part 2, Kindle.
This imagined invitation is meant to inspire people to follow Jesus back out into the world to work for the kingdom of God. Commenting on the outward trajectory of the \textit{Exercises}, theologian Monika Hellwig writes, “Ignatian prayer leads to a practical choice about how to live in the world, how to make the gospel credible and vital, how to incarnate within oneself the values of the kingdom.”\textsuperscript{64}

The \textit{Spiritual Exercises} have the potential to support compassionate service in a struggling community by helping believers abide in the love of God, experience freedom from disordered affections, discover God in their daily experience, and discern how they might practically serve God in the world. As Jesuit priest Kevin O’Brien summarizes, the purpose of the \textit{Exercises} is:

\begin{quote}
. . . to grow in union with God, who frees us to make good decisions about our lives and to “help souls.” Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ. The Exercises help us grow in interior freedom from sin and disordered loves so that we can respond more generously to God’s call in our life.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

As people are transformed by an intimate encounter with God and discover freedom from attachments, they are able to respond to God’s call on their life. The \textit{Exercises} present an approach to spiritual formation that brings into balance a life of prayer and a life of service. This balance is embodied in Ignatius himself. William James writes, “Ignatius was a mystic, but his mysticism made him one of the most powerfully practical human engines that ever lived.”\textsuperscript{66} Ignatius elevates the need for an experiential, mystical


\textsuperscript{65} O’Brien, \textit{The Ignatian Adventure}, 14.

\textsuperscript{66} Quoted in Martin, \textit{Jesuit Guide}, 18.
encounter with God; yet, he believes that these encounters inspire people to practically serve God in the world. Cowlitz County, with all of its socioeconomic challenges, could use some practical mystics.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation proposed in this project has the potential to motivate and empower the people of Longview Community Church to engage their community with the love of God in practical ways. The Ignatian emphasis on experiencing God in scripture and daily life intersects with a religious landscape in the Pacific Northwest that is skeptical of institutional religion but open to spiritual experience. The Ignatian emphasis on abiding in the love of God, experiencing spiritual freedom, finding God in daily experience, and discerning God’s leading has the potential to motivate and inspire compassionate service in this socioeconomically depressed community.

Having explored how this project engages the community context, I now look at the specific church context where the project is implemented. This project is implemented at Longview Community Church, which is an interdenominational Protestant church situated in the heart of the Pacific Northwest. I now explore how an approach to spiritual formation developed by a fifteenth century Catholic mystic might support the ministry of this contemporary Protestant church.
CHAPTER TWO

THE EXERCISES AT LONGVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH

This chapter evaluates the obstacles and opportunities associated with implementing an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation at Longview Community Church (LCC). It shows how Ignatian spiritual formation relates to the history and theology, vision, mission and values, expressed needs, demographics, and current discipleship ministries at LCC. This chapter points out the ways Ignatian spiritual formation currently aligns with the culture at LCC and explores how the areas of divergence can be overcome through proper contextualization.

History and Theology

LCC was founded in 1923 at the time Longview, Washington was being formed as a city. The city was originally started as a company town centered around the Long-Bell lumber company, which operated a lumber mill on the Columbia River. In order to attract families to the new city, Robert A. Long wanted Longview to have schools, churches, parks and other amenities. ¹ It was not originally practical to set up numerous

denominational churches to accommodate people moving to the city, so the vision of an interdenominational community church was born.²

The original constitution of LCC captures its interdenominational vision. The constitution reads:

The Longview Community Church of Longview, Washington, is an interdenominational body composed of members from many theological backgrounds, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, demonstrating the truth of St. Paul’s words, “there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye were called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all.” It imposes on its members a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and an acceptance of the ordinance of baptism . . . It’s working motto is “each for all and all for Christ.”³

From the outset, LCC embraced a generous orthodoxy that sought to make room for people from a variety of theological backgrounds. LCC left room for diversity around peripheral matters, honoring, for example, both infant and adult baptism, while maintaining unity under a confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

While LCC is an interdenominational church, it is rooted in the Protestant evangelical tradition. The current statement of faith at LCC reads:

We are convinced that Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture and proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, is the only ground for our reconciliation to God. This commitment implies acceptance of historic creeds (The Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed), the confessions of the early Christian Church and the Reformation as reliable summaries of Biblical teaching. We consider ourselves a part of the Reformed Protestant Christian Church.⁴

² Ibid.
³ Longview Community Church Constitution, adopted March 24, 1925.
The Protestant orientation of Longview Community Church has been reflected in its pastoral leadership. The founding pastor, Reverend Ed Gebert was a Methodist minister, and the following five senior pastors were from the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). Associate pastors have come from a variety of Protestant denominations including the Church of God, American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Christian Reformed Church of North America.

The historical and theological background of LCC presents both opportunities and obstacles for integrating the Ignatian Exercises. On the one hand, LCC’s ecumenical background has created a culture of openness toward different theological perspectives. While firmly rooted in the Protestant tradition, LCC provides more room for divergent voices than might be found in a more strictly defined Protestant denominational setting. The theological diversity at LCC suggests that there might be potential for the perspective of a Catholic mystic like Ignatius to gain a hearing.

Furthermore, the biblical nature of the Exercises connects with Protestant evangelical spirituality. Joyce Huggett writes, “The Spiritual Exercises are so Bible-based that they might accurately be re-named 'Biblical Exercises'. Because of their innate love of the Bible, evangelicals find themselves on familiar, safe territory right from the beginning of their exploration into Ignatian methods of praying the scriptures.”5 Since Ignatian meditation is firmly rooted in the scriptures, it creates a sense of familiarity and trust for Protestants who see scripture as an ultimate source of authority. Thus,

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introducing the *Exercises* in at LCC potentially requires less contextualization than more mystical forms of contemplation that are not based on biblical reflection.

While an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has potential to thrive in an ecumenical, biblically focused church, there are obstacles that need to be overcome. One way the *Exercises* can be contextualized is by omitting content that directly contradicts the teachings of the Protestant church. For example, Ignatius often advocates praying to Mary or the saints, or meditating on hypothetical scenarios that are not in the scriptures. For example, in the first meditation of the fourth week, Ignatius invites people to meditate on and imagined scenario in which Jesus appears to his mother Mary.⁶ These extra-biblical reflections would likely be unfamiliar and may make Protestant evangelicals uncomfortable. The success of the *Exercises* do not require these elements to be included, so simply avoiding this content may be helpful.

The *Exercises* can also be contextualized to a Protestant setting by showing how they connect with scripture. For example, Protestant evangelicals may initially be wary of engaging in imaginative contemplation of the gospel narratives on the grounds using the imagination might lead people outside of the boundaries of scripture. Evangelical theologian Brandon O’Brien observes that evangelical Christians “often do not think too highly of the imagination. If we let the imagination run wild, they fear, we risk sacrificing the truth.”⁷ In response to this concern it may be helpful to articulate how the New Testament writers intended for readers to engage their imagination. James Wakefield

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makes this point in his introduction to the Exercises for a Protestant audience, by explaining how the gospel writers seek to draw people into the scriptures by writing about historic events in the present tense.⁸ Most of the modern English translations of the gospels fail to capture this grammatical feature and instead translate the gospels using past tense verbs. Wakefield quotes the following excerpt from the introduction to the New American Standard Bible:

In regard to the use of the historic present, the Board recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than the past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the Board felt that it would be wise to change these historic presents into English past tenses.⁹

The grammar of the gospel accounts encourages the use of the imagination. The narrative genres of scripture also encourage the use of the imagination. For example, Jesus regularly tells parables to help people imagine what life in the kingdom of God is like. As Timothy Gallagher articulates, “Scripture itself is often imaginative literature: it recounts events intended to engage our imaginations.”¹⁰

Another aspect of the Exercises that may need to be contextualized for a Protestant context is Ignatius’ emphasis on the role that affective experiences play in discerning the movements of God. Ignatius argues that the presence of God is accompanied by an underlying experience of consolation, whereas the absence of God is


⁹ Quoted in Ibid., chap. 2, Kindle.

accompanied by an experience of desolation.¹¹ These affective experiences play an
important role in Ignatius’ understanding of how people discern God’s leading in their life.¹² Gordon Smith, an evangelical Ignatian scholar, notices evangelicals are often suspicious of Ignatius’ focus on emotions. He writes, “It is common, at least in evangelical religious communities, to hear that ‘our faith rests not on feelings but on the promises of God’s word.’”¹³ He goes on to say, “Feelings are viewed as dangerous—not to be trusted and definitely not a critical indicator of the character of our souls.”¹⁴ Smith responds to these concerns by noting the Ignatian emphasis on affective experience finds close parallels in the Protestant writings of both John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards.¹⁵ Both Wesley and Edwards argue the scriptures locate spirituality at the level of the heart and consistently affirm the role of affective experience in discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit. Smith writes:

What we see from Ignatius and Edwards, as well as from Wesley, is that we do not know ourselves, much less God and the presence of God in our lives, unless we are able to make some sense of what is happening to us emotionally . . . what our spiritual heritage gives us is an appreciation that this presence is known and experienced by a critical reflection on the affect.¹⁶

¹¹ David Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 248-251.

¹² This concept will be explained in more depth in the fifth chapter of this project. See pages 117-118.


¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34-55.

¹⁶ Ibid, 53.
Smith points to Jonathan Edwards’ conclusion that, “The Holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affections; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion and zeal.” Ignatius’ emphasis on the role of affective experience in spiritual discernment can be contextualized to a Protestant context, then, by providing connection points to scripture and Protestant theology.

Overall, LCC may be less resistant than to Ignatian spiritual formation than many other traditions due to its ecumenical history and theology. Furthermore, the biblically based nature of Ignatian meditation aligns with LCC’s emphasis on the authority of scripture. Potential concerns about Ignatius’ emphasis on praying with the imagination and placing value on affective experience can be dealt with by showing how these practices find parallels in scripture and the broader Protestant theological tradition.

Having looked at LCC’s history and theology, I now look at how an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation connects with the current vision, mission, and values of LCC.

**Vision, Mission, Values**

In the winter of 2018 the leadership of LCC developed a new vision, mission, and values statement to guide the church into its next season of ministry. LCC’s vision is “to be known as a welcoming family, being transformed by Christ, and expressing His unconditional love to our neighbors.” The mission statement is “to actively love God, grow together, and serve others.” The core values that guide ministry at LCC are,

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17 Quoted in Ibid., 49.
“unceasing prayer, holistic worship, formative discipleship, authentic relationships, compassionate generosity, and intergenerational fellowship.”

The vision, mission and values of LCC align with the Ignatian *Exercises* in a number of ways. LCC has adopted the language of spiritual transformation and formative discipleship. This language envisions an approach to spiritual formation that does not just inform minds but forms lives. There is a desire for people to experience whole-life transformation as they engage with the life and ministry of the church. This holistic experience lies at the heart of the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation. Ignatius articulates the goal of the *Exercises* is “for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.”

Ignatius is not simply concerned with helping people gain a deeper theological understanding of God but to encounter and respond to God with a whole heart.

Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation also aligns with the core values of unceasing prayer and holistic worship. These values speak of the need for integrating spirituality into all areas of life. They echo the original vision in the founding constitution of LCC, which states that the church “treats religion not as a separate business set apart from life, but as a divine spirit pervading every activity of life.” The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation seeks the integration of faith and life. James Martin suggests that if you asked a Jesuit to define Ignatian spirituality, “The first thing out of their mouths

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19 Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 5.

20 LCC Church Constitution, 2.
would most likely be finding God in all things.” Ignatius highlights the importance of finding God in all things in his Principle and Foundation saying, “All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily.” Ignatius’ emphasis that God can be found in creation aligns with Paul’s statement in Romans 1:20 where he says, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.” If God can be found in all things, the scope of the spiritual life can be expanded. People can relate to God not only in religious settings but also in everyday life. Ignatius’ prayer of examen, which is introduced in this project, helps people discover God in all things by inviting them to prayerfully reflect on their experience.

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation proposed in this project aligns with the current vision, mission and values of LCC in a number of ways. Ignatius’ interest in helping people not only understand God but encounter and respond to God aligns with LCC’s desire to pursue an approach to spiritual formation that focuses not only in information but transformation. Ignatius’ emphasis on helping people find God in all things aligns with LCC’s values of holistic worship, and unceasing prayer. I now look at some of the expressed needs that LCC must address if they hope to live into this vision.

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22 Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship, 27
Expressed Needs

To facilitate the development of LCC’s new ministry vision, the congregation participated in the Church Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) from the organization “Leadership Transformations,” in the fall of 2017. This assessment invited members of LCC to evaluate the strengths and growth areas of the congregation. The survey evaluated ten characteristics of the church, which include God’s empowering presence, God-exalting worship, spiritual disciplines, learning and growing in community, loving and caring relationships, servant-leadership development, outward focus, wise administration and accountability, networking with the Body of Christ, and stewardship and generosity. The survey invited the congregation to name the top three strengths and top three areas that need improvement in the church. The top three strengths identified by the congregation were God exalting worship, a commitment to loving and caring relationships, and God’s empowering presence. The top three growth areas named by the congregation were networking in the Body of Christ, an outward focus, and spiritual disciplines.

An Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to help LCC address some of these growth areas. The Exercises addresses the expressed need for more guidance in the spiritual disciplines. Participants in the ministry initiative developed in this project learn the disciplines of prayer and meditation, develop a rhythm of morning and evening prayer, and receive personal coaching and group accountability for their daily prayer life.

23 These categories are derived from, Steve Macchia, Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).
The *Exercises* also supports the expressed need for the church to develop a more outward focus. There is a danger that spiritual formation initiatives can cause people to focus on an inward journey at the expense of outward ministry. Trevor Hudson writes:

> If our communion with God isolates us from the painful realities of our world, inoculates us against feeling the pain of our neighbors, and leads us into an excessive preoccupation with our own well-being, it must be considered suspect. If, on the other hand, it finds expression in greater compassion and a willingness to show care, then it passes the test for genuineness.\(^{24}\)

As explained in chapter one, the *Exercises* has the potential to inspire and sustain effective engagement in society.\(^{25}\) Ignatius advocates for a balance between prayer and mission. James Martin writes:

> Balancing work and prayer, the active and contemplative, was essential to the early Jesuits. And still is. One of our recent General Congregations wrote that Jesuits need to be “undividedly apostolic and religious.” The connection between work and worship “needs to animate our whole way of living, praying and working.” Work without prayer becomes detached from God. Prayer without work becomes detached from human beings.\(^{26}\)

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to equip the people of Longview Community Church to cultivate a greater outward focus.

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation implemented in this project supports two of the main expressed needs of LCC—cultivating the spiritual disciplines and developing an outward focus. This project addresses the congregations expressed desire to grow in their personal spiritual disciplines by providing instruction, accountability, and a structure for developing a personal prayer life. The Ignatian emphasis on balancing

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\(^{25}\) See pages 29-37 of this project.

prayer and action speaks to the congregations desire to be more outwardly focused. Having outlined these needs I now look how LCC’s demographics might impact the introduction of the Ignatian *Exercises*.

**Demographics**

The *Exercises* are meant to be adapted to the needs and situation of the participants. Ignatius says to directors of the retreat, “We should be aware that the Spiritual Exercises are meant to be adapted for us by the director who takes account of our age and maturity, education, potential, and talents.”27 Following Ignatius’ advice, this section explores how the *Exercises* can be adapted to the specific demographics of LCC. This section explores how the *Exercises* relates to three specific demographics at LCC—age of members, length of time people have been Christians, and education level. Each demographic is described in its own subsection and includes a commentary on its relevance to the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation being proposed in this project.

**Age of Members**

LCC is an aging congregation. A total of 39.2 percent of the congregation is seventy or older, 25.4 percent of the congregation is between sixty and sixty-nine, 12.8 percent of the congregation is between fifty and fifty-nine years old, 13.5 percent is between forty and forty-nine, 5.4 percent is between ages thirty and thirty-nine, 0.7

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27 Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 17.
percent is between twenty and twenty-nine, and 2.7 percent is under age twenty.\textsuperscript{28} This means less than 10 percent of the congregation is under the age of forty. Overall, 65 percent of the congregation is sixty or older.

There are a number of ways the \textit{Exercises} connect with an older congregation. First, older and retired members may have more discretionary time with which to engage the \textit{Exercises}. The Ignatian process of spiritual formation proposed in this project requires people to spend around forty-five minutes a day in extended times of prayer and reflection. Those who are in retirement potentially have more space to engage in this process than people who are in busier seasons of life with children and work.

Second, the reflective nature of Ignatian prayer supports a critical developmental need for people in later stages of life. Developmental psychologist Erik Erickson suggests that old age is often becomes reflective season, when people are trying to make sense of the meaning of their life. Erikson says that the main developmental crisis faced by older adults is whether they will discover ego integrity or face despair.\textsuperscript{29} Erikson describes ego integrity as “a sense of coherence and wholeness,” to one’s life.\textsuperscript{30} Psychologist Saul McCleod explains this stage a follows:

\begin{quote}
It is during this time that we contemplate our accomplishments and can develop integrity if we see ourselves as leading a successful life. Erik Erikson believed if we see our lives as unproductive, feel guilt about our past, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we become dissatisfied with life and develop despair, often leading to depression and hopelessness.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{28} These statistics are drawn from the CHAT survey conducted at LCC in the fall of 2017.

\textsuperscript{29} Erik Erikson, \textit{The Lifecycle Completed}, (New York: Norton, 1982), 56.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 65.

Ignatius encourages people to intentionally reflect on their life when they go through the *Exercises*. For example, in the original *Exercises*, he invites people to do a general confession where they review the mistakes of their life and seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God.\(^{32}\) Many contemporary versions of the *Exercises* encourage people to write out a spiritual autobiography,\(^{33}\) or prayerfully review relevant aspects of their spiritual journey.\(^{34}\) Those who participate in the ministry initiative developed in this project explore their spiritual autobiography, work through their history of sin and grace, and explore their sense of calling in their current season of life. This reflective aspect of Ignatian prayer has the potential to help people evaluate the significance of their life in the context of prayer. Exploring regrets and mistakes in the context of God’s love and redemption can potentially help older people avoid the pitfall of despair that can set in at this developmental stage of life.

While LCC is an aging congregation, there is also a desire among the body to find ways to reach out and enfold younger people. Spiritual formation initiatives, then, should not only take into account the needs of existing members but also consider the needs of emerging generations. Therefore, it is important to say a word about how the *Exercises* might engage younger people. In the book *Growing Young*, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Grad Griffin explore the spiritual values among millennial Christians. Their research

\(^{32}\) Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 40-41.


\(^{34}\) James Wakefield, *Sacred Listening*, part 2, unit 2, Kindle. Wakefield encourages participants to develop a chart that traces their experiences of joy, close relationships, images of God and self, view of life’s purpose, seasons of hardship, and experiences of rebellion.
suggests that young people are drawn to presentations of the gospel that are “less about abstract beliefs and more about Jesus, less tied to formulas and more focused on redemptive narrative, and less about heaven later and more about life here and now.”

These values line up significantly with the Ignatius’ vision of the spiritual journey. Ignatius does not present the gospel as a formula but invites people to immerse themselves in the narratives of the gospel. Furthermore, Ignatius seeks to help people integrate faith and life rather than focusing solely on eternity. Powell, Mulder and Griffin comment, “Young people don’t just want to be saved from something later; they want to be saved for something now. They want to get to work. They want to be significant. They want lives filled with action, not just restrictions.” These values resonate with Ignatius’ vision in his Principle and Foundation, where he invites people to engage the world and “show reverence for all the gifts of creation and collaborate with God in using them so that by being good stewards we develop as loving persons in our care for God’s world and its development.” Ignatius presents a life-affirming vision of the gospel that calls people to collaborate with him in caring for the world and participating in the common good of society. This emphasis has the potential to resonate with the spiritual longings of young people.

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36 Ibid., 142.

37 Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 27.
Length of Time as a Christian

The vast majority of the members of LCC have been Christians for a long time. A total of 89 percent of the congregation indicates they have been a Christian for ten years or more, 4 percent for six to nine years, 3 percent for three to five years, 2 percent for two years or less, and 3 percent have not yet made a faith commitment. These numbers indicate the majority of the congregation is made up of people who are not new to the Christian faith.

While the length of time a person has been a Christ follower does not guarantee spiritual maturity, it does suggest that many of LCC’s members have moved past the early stages of spiritual development. Through participating in the Christian life for over a decade, the majority of the congregation has been exposed to discipleship opportunities through regular participation in corporate worship, small groups, Christian education classes, and service opportunities. Therefore, a contextually sensitive spiritual formation initiative must consider the spiritual needs of people who may be further along in the spiritual journey.

In their book *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich observe that people, who have gone through the initial faith stages of conversion, basic discipleship, and active service, often encounter a need for a deeper prayer life. They describe this stage as follows:

Stage 4, The Journey Inward, is aptly described by its title, for it is a deep and very personal inward journey . . . Until now, our journey has had an external

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38 These stats are taken from a spiritual formation survey conducted at LCC in the spring of 2012.

dimension to it. Our life of faith was more visible, more outwardly oriented, even though things certainly were happening inside us. But the focus fell more on the outside, the community of faith, nature, leadership, the display and use of the Spirit's gifts, belonging, and productivity.

At this stage, we face an abrupt change (at least many do) almost the opposite mode. It's a mode of questioning, exploring . . . A symbolic name for people in this stage is the “vertical people." It is a time when the issues go primarily up and down between you and God. Others are involved, but the focus is on the issues, battle, healing, and resolution in your relationship with God. 40

Hagberg and Guelich notice that after people have been actively engaged in the life of the church for a number of years they often enter a season where they are looking for a deeper connection with God. Thomas Ashbrook notices a similar movement in his study on Teresa of Avila’s *The Interior Castle*, where Teresa describes seven stages or “mansions” of the spiritual journey. Teresa’s third “mansion” or faith stage is marked by a time of discipleship and active service. This stage is followed by a deepening journey of intimacy with God. Ashbrook describes the movement from the third to fourth mansion as follows:

God is calling us to a new level of knowing Him in His love. His gentle whispers of love and the mystery of His divine light pique our curiosity and cause a restlessness within us that will eventually lead to the fourth mansion. So, for us to continue our growth, we must focus more toward relationship with God rather than simply work for Him.41

Teresa’s fourth “mansion” is similar to the fourth stage of described by Hagsberg and Guelich. Many people who have passed through the initial stages of discipleship seek a deeper journey with God.

40 Ibid., 93.

Unfortunately, churches are not always equipped to help people navigate this stage of the spiritual life. Hagberg and Guelich observe:

The church is generally best at working with people in stages 1 through 3... So many people leave the church when they experience stage 4 (the inward journey) or the Wall, since there are few resources or programs available for them, and they feel estranged when the faith they held dear does not work for them any more.”

Thomas Ashbrook makes a similar observation about the lack of church support for people at this stage of the spiritual life saying, “Unfortunately, many of us who are hungry for God have never been taught about meditation and contemplation. To the contrary, many churches have given these concepts over to Eastern religions and New Age religions, and they urge prohibition of these “abiding” forms of prayer.” Ashbrook laments that many people, without guidance at this stage of the spiritual journey, “get stuck, longing for a deeper experience of God but not finding it.”

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to be a resource to people who are moving beyond the initial stages of spiritual growth and service in the church toward a deepening journey of intimacy with God. When commenting on the transition from the third to fourth mansion in Teresian spirituality, Thomas Ashbrook writes:

We need to be encouraged to begin to listen to God, both in Scripture and in prayer, to “take time” to more fully “abide in Christ,” where we can learn to hear His voice and respond to the touches of His love. Prayer disciplines, such as the Ignatian Exercises and prayer retreats, that furnish extended times for reflection

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44 Ibid.
help us move from discursive prayer to greater degrees of meditation on Scripture and listening with the heart.\textsuperscript{45}

Hagberg and Guelich make a similar point suggesting that retreats, spiritual direction, and teaching on listening prayer and journaling can support people at this stage in their spiritual journey.\textsuperscript{46} They see a vital need for the church to invest in people at this stage of faith as many people are often left to figure out their changing relationship with God for themselves by looking outside the church to retreat centers and monasteries.\textsuperscript{47} The fact that LCC has so many people who have been on the Christian journey for numerous years, necessitates investment in spiritual formation initiatives that help people navigate the movement into these later stages of faith.

Education

The members of LCC tend to be well-educated. A total of 51.4 percent of the congregation are college or university graduates, 24.3 percent of the congregation have a masters or doctorate degree, 21.6 percent have a high school diploma and only 2.7 percent do not have a high school diploma.\textsuperscript{48} Taken together that means that 75.7 percent of the congregation have a college degree or higher.

The education level at LCC has the potential to be an asset when implementing an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation. The project proposed in this study requires self-direction, sustained reflection, discernment, and the capacity to engage new ideas. While

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., chap. 6, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{46} Hagberg and Guelich, \textit{Critical Journey}, 173.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.,172.

\textsuperscript{48} These statistics are derived from the CHAT survey conducted at LCC in the fall of 2017.
this in no way excludes those without a history of higher education, those with a college education have potentially honed many of these skills.

At the same time, an educated demographic may also struggle with the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation. Ignatius invites people to move beyond cognitive thinking to an integrated approach to knowledge that values emotional insights and religious experiences. David Fleming notes, “In the exercise ‘The Call of the King,’ Ignatius says that there are two responses to God's call. One response comes from the reasonable person. The second response is from the generous or magnanimous person. We might call it the response of the heart.”49 In order to cultivate a response of the heart Ignatius promotes a more holistic approach to knowledge, which is “inclusive and takes seriously the knowledge-bearing capacity not only of the mind but also of the body, emotions, sense, imagination, feelings, intuition, and dreams.”50 This may be a stretch for those who have been shaped by an educational system that is focuses more on the mind than the heart. David Fleming writes:

Most of us face a persistent temptation to make the Spiritual Exercises or any kind of spiritual renewal a matter of changing the way we think . . . It is vital to realize that understanding is not the goal. We can understand a great number of things, but this may not affect the way we live our lives. The goal is a response of the heart, which truly changes the whole person.51

This temptation to focus understanding on cognitive thinking may be amplified for those with extensive experience in higher education. Therefore, in order to contextualize


Ignatian prayer to an educated audience, the legitimacy of emotional insights and religious experience in the formation of knowledge must be established.

Demographics Summary

An Ignatian approach to spiritual formation proposed in this project addresses the needs posed by the demographics of LCC in a number of ways. An Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to connect with an aging congregation that potentially has more space for extended spiritual practice and may benefit from prayerful reflection on their life. It also connects with the longings of younger generations that are interested in approaches to spirituality that are experiential and culturally engaged. Ignatian spiritual formation also has the potential to meet the needs of more mature Christians who are often looking for a deeper prayer life. Lastly, the education level at LCC may be an asset when implementing this project as it invites people to engage new ideas, but it may also be a drawback as Ignatius encourages a more holistic approach to learning that moves people beyond cognitive approaches to learning. Having explored the relevant demographics at LCC, I now look at how an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation can integrate into the existing discipleship ministries at LCC.

Discipleship Ministry Compatibility at LCC

This section explores the way LCC currently approaches discipleship ministry. It looks at some of the potential ways the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation fits into the existing structures. It also considers some of the barriers that need to be overcome.
Since LCC is a diverse congregation with people at various stages of faith, the discipleship ministry of the church allows for a lot of variety. In the fall, winter, and spring quarters LCC averages between fifteen and eighteen small groups and classes. These groups range from formal Christian education classes taught by pastors and lay leaders, to more informal fellowship groups that meet in homes. Individual groups have input into the format and curriculum that best meets their needs. Curriculum decisions are discerned in conversation with the spiritual formation pastor.

Some helpful groundwork has been laid for the implementation of an Ignatian spiritual formation group. Over the last few years LCC has introduced a number of spiritual formation initiatives that have exposed people to spiritual disciplines and contemplative prayer. For example, an annual prayer retreat has been offered each summer for the last five years. This retreat draws on Gordon Smith’s devotional, *Alone With The Lord: A Guide to A Personal Day of Prayer*, which is based on the *Spiritual Exercises*. This retreat introduces the prayer of examen, imaginative contemplation, and Ignatian discernment. Also, a number of spiritual formation classes have been offered. For example, some of our small groups went through James Bryan Smith’s *Apprenticeship Series*, which invites people to grasp a vision for a formative approach to discipleship, experiment with daily spiritual practices, and create a rule of life. Also, a quarterly contemplative Taizé prayer service began six years ago. Taizé is a community in France that developed a popular approach to worship that includes silent

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contemplation, *lectio divina*, and meditative singing. These spiritual formation initiatives have created interest in Ignatian prayer and form a foundation on which a more intensive Ignatian prayer group can be built.

At the same time, the spiritual formation initiative proposed in this project differs from the majority of the existing groups and classes at LCC. Many of the discipleship groups at LCC are focused heavily on teaching and discussing theology. Many people at LCC are familiar with groups that are focused more on discussing ideas than reflecting on spiritual experience. In order for this project to be successful, participants and leaders will need to be trained in how to engage in a different type of curriculum and group process than they are used to. In the Encounter retreat, participants learn how to participate in contemplative sharing groups that value talking about and listening to spiritual experiences as opposed to having theological discussions.

**Chapter Conclusion**

There are many areas of alignment between the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation and the current culture of LCC. The congregation’s ecumenical roots, current vision and values, expressed needs, demographics and existing discipleship ministry of LCC suggest that an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation has the potential to thrive and help the church grow into a congregation whose members love God more deeply and engage the culture more meaningfully. At the same time, an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation must be properly contextualized to a Protestant setting, an aging demographic, and a current discipleship strategy focused more on informing the mind than transforming the heart.
This concludes the context section of the project. Having surveyed the community and church context where this project is implemented, I now develop a theological vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in the local church. Chapter three provides a literature review of resources pertinent to the development of this project. Chapter four looks at the overall theology of the church and explores how the Ignatian *Exercises* might support the church in fulfilling its mission. Chapter five forms the theological center of the project, exploring how the *Exercises* facilitates the transformation of the heart.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review of pertinent resources related to Ignatian spirituality and the *Spiritual Exercises*. It begins by reviewing David Fleming’s literal translation and contemporary reading of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, titled *Draw Me into Your Friendship*. Fleming’s work provides the foundational source material for this project. Next, this chapter reviews three contemporary resources that identify different aspects of Ignatian spirituality. Howard Gray’s essay “Ignatian Spirituality,” introduces an Ignatian vision for spirituality; William Barry’s book, *Finding God in All Things*, explores the theology of the *Exercises*; and James Martin book, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, evaluates how Ignatian spirituality supports missional engagement and intersects with a post-modern culture. Lastly, a review is provided for two different contemporary approaches to the nineteenth annotation of *Spiritual Exercises*, which adapt the *Exercises* into daily life. Kevin O’Brien’s *The Ignatian Adventure* is written from a Jesuit perspective, and James Wakefield’s *Sacred Listening* is written from a Protestant perspective.
Draw Me into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises, by David Fleming

David Fleming is a Jesuit priest, spiritual director, and Ignatian scholar. In this volume, Fleming provides a literal translation of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises alongside a contemporary reading of the Spiritual Exercises. Fleming’s purpose in writing this book is to “provide a truly contemporary reading [of the Spiritual Exercises] which allows directors and retreatants an easy identity and application.”

Main Argument

The Spiritual Exercises outline a number of spiritual practices that are organized into a thirty-day retreat. Ignatius summarizes the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises in his first annotation, writing:

This name of Spiritual Exercises is meant every way of examining one’s conscience, of meditating, of contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally and of performing other spiritual actions . . . [for] disposing the soul to rid itself of all the disordered tendencies, and, after it is rid, to seek and find the Divine Will as to the management of one’s life for the salvation of the soul.

Ignatius suggests that the various prayer practices proposed in the Exercises are meant to help people experience spiritual freedom and respond to God’s leading in their life.

Ignatius divides the Spiritual Exercises into three main sections. He begins with some preliminary guidelines where he speaks about the purpose of the retreat, the pre-

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2 Ibid., v.

3 Ibid., 4.
requisites for those who seek to embark on the retreat, guidelines for the directors of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and insights into how they might be adapted to fit different types of people and circumstances. Ignatius then outlines the content of the four weeks of the retreat. Fleming summarizes the weeks as follows:

The first week is set in the context of God’s creative love, its rejection by each of us through sin, and God’s reconciling mercy in Jesus. The second week centers on the life of Jesus, from its beginnings through his public ministry. The third week fixes upon Jesus’s passion, crucifixion and death. The fourth week considers the risen Christ and the world, which has been renewed in his victory.\(^4\)

Lastly, Ignatius adds a number of supplemental materials, which include instructions on how to pray, guidelines for discernment, notes about to help people who are dealing with false guilt, and insight into how to relate to the world and the church following the retreat.

Relevance to Topic

The *Spiritual Exercises* forms the central primary source for the development of my project. It contains Ignatius’ notes on the necessary prerequisites and preparations needed before embarking on the retreat, explanations on the various forms of prayer and meditation that facilitate an encounter with God, and the content directors are to assign retreatants for the prayer sessions. While I do not implement the entire *Spiritual Exercises* in this project, I draw heavily on Ignatius’ introductory annotations, the content of the first week of the retreat and his supplementary material on his three methods of prayer.

\(^4\) Ibid., 7.
David Fleming’s contemporary reading of the *Exercises* is helpful for implementing Ignatius’ insights into a contemporary context. He helps to make sense of some of the confusing language in the original text and he makes helpful applications to contemporary life. For example, he draws in contemporary insights from modern psychiatry when analyzing Ignatius’ limited perspective on the problem of false guilt.\(^5\) In this way, Fleming helps bridge the gap between the fifteenth and twenty-first centuries. Fleming also provides a helpful appendix that suggests potential scriptural texts to be used in the initial exercises and the first week of the Ignatian retreat. Although not provided in the original *Exercises*, these scriptures prove helpful for the development of the Encounter retreat.

**Limitations**

This resource is limited in a few ways. First, the *Spiritual Exercises* is organized around a thirty-day retreat. While Ignatius gives some initial insight into how this might be adapted to a retreat in daily life in his nineteenth annotation, it is left to the facilitator to reformat the retreat appropriately. The material in this resource, therefore, needs to be significantly adapted to fit the parameters and goals of this project. Second, Ignatius speaks about the need for people to be prepared for the retreat, but he does not provide useful material for how to go about that preparation. Lastly, the *Spiritual Exercises* is thoroughly embedded in Catholic theology and practice. For example, Ignatius often promotes praying to Mary and practicing rigorous penance. This resource will need to be adapted to fit a contemporary Protestant context.

\(^5\) Ibid., 275-279.
“Ignatian Spirituality,” By Howard Gray⁶

The late Howard Gray, SJ is a prominent academic voice for Ignatian theology. The core thesis of Howard Gray’s essay reads as follows: “Ignatian spirituality is at its heart a discerning pilgrimage to God guided by three important elements: the reality of Christ, the mission entrusted to his church, and human experience.”⁷ Gray describes Ignatian spirituality as a journey that is marked by encountering God as one participates in mission within a Christian framework.

Main Argument

Gray explains how Ignatius facilitates a spiritual pilgrimage by inviting people to contemplate the gospel narratives. What is unique about the Ignatian approach to Scripture reading is that it invites people to allow the example of Christ to shape their own journey. Gray explains how the Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises is marked by a “rhythm of prayerful reflection on the direction of one’s life in comparison to the direction of Christ’s life.”⁸ Ignatius invites people to engage the scriptures to respond to the life and teachings of Christ personally. Gray writes, “The gospel narrative does not simply inspire but it has an animating, spiritual power that reaches into the history, psychology, and ambitions of men and women who make the Exercises.” Gray then concludes, “The aim

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⁷ Ibid., 59.

⁸ Ibid., 61.
of such contemplation is to integrate the mind and heart of the person making the Exercises with the values and affections portrayed by Jesus. Gospel contemplation works towards union.” Gray emphasizes that the goal of the *Exercises* is not simply information but a transformative encounter with God.

Relevance to Topic

Gray’s introduction to Ignatian spirituality contributes to the development of this project in a number of ways. First, Gray helps to explain the underlying theological vision of Ignatian spirituality. He articulates how Ignatius helps people to not simply understand the gospel narratives but to encounter Christ in the text.

Gray also offers some helpful insights into the specific prerequisites that are needed for those who seek to embark on this spiritual pilgrimage. He overviews the chapter in Ignatius’ *Constitutions* that deals with ascetical and mystical advice. Here, Ignatius suggests the ability to engage in contemplation requires attention, reverence, and devotion. Attention refers to an ability to focus and slow down. Gray writes, “Attention takes the time and energy needed to let the density of the episode become my story, too. It is the difference between being merely a spectator and an active participant.” Reverence means a willingness to humbly respond to God. Finally, devotion speaks of a strong personal response to the revelation of God. Gray describes devotion as “a moment

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9 Ibid., 67.

10 Ibid., 65.

11 Ibid.
when the heart is touched, drawing the person to great love or deeper faith or surer trust or to a more courageous willingness to follow Jesus.”

Limitations

Howard Gray’s provides a helpful overview of Ignatian spirituality, but it is limited in its scope. He does not provide detail about how to help people cultivate the dispositions of attention, reverence, and devotion. He names the needs but does not develop the solutions. Gray’s article is also limited in that he does not speak about the specific dynamics of introducing Ignatian prayer in a non-Catholic setting.

Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, by William Barry

William Barry is a Jesuit priest and well-known spiritual director and writer. His goal in writing Finding God In All Things is to show how the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola can become relevant and accessible for use in the contemporary church. He is concerned that the process of spiritual formation found in Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises has been misunderstood as “something esoteric, something reserved for novices or vowed members of religious communities, for holy people.” His purpose

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12 Ibid., 68.


14 Ibid., 11.
in writing is to “dispel that image and invite readers to consider how they might use the Spiritual Exercises to benefit their relationship with God.”\textsuperscript{15}

Main Argument

Barry writes a chapter based on each of the sections of the \textit{Spiritual Exercises} and explains how they connect with life in the modern world. His book is filled with helpful illustrations of how contemporary people have experienced and benefited from the \textit{Exercises}. He seeks to show how each component of Ignatius’ \textit{Spiritual Exercises} is undergirded by the goal of helping people discover God in all things. He writes, “The Spiritual Exercises are various methods to help us to become more and more aware of this ever-present God. If we want to, we can become contemplatives in action, people who are alert to God’s presence in all our daily activities.”\textsuperscript{16}

Relevance to Topic

Chapter one, two, and six of Barry’s book are particularly relevant to this project. Barry’s first chapter speaks about some of the barriers that many people need to work through before engaging in the entire \textit{Exercises}. He recounts how Ignatius spent four years working with Pierre Favre before taking him through the \textit{Exercises}. Barry writes, “Pierre was full of scruples, terrified of God’s wrath. He seems to have had an image of God as a terrifying snoop seeking to catch him out. With such an image of God he could not enter the Spiritual Exercises with trust and hope and great desires for closeness to

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 20.
Barry goes on to explain how those who embark on the *Exercises* may need time to work through the barriers that would get in the way of their being able to trust and interact with God. Barry writes, “Sometimes people need to speak out their anger at life’s hurts and tragedies before they can come to a trusting and warm relationship with God.” These insights intersect a core goal of the Encounter retreat, which is to help prepare people for the *Exercises*.

Barry’s second chapter addresses the importance of cultivating a vision for the spiritual life at the outset of the *Exercises*. Ignatius presents his own vision in his Principle and Foundation at the beginning of the *Exercises*. Barry reminds the reader that Ignatius’ vision statement for the spiritual life is a rooted in Ignatius’ own experience. Thus, he suggests that at the outset of the *Exercises* people need space to not simply reflect on these theological statements of Ignatius but to explore how they experience these theological truths in their everyday life. One of the initial tasks of the Ignatian journey, then, is to discover a compelling vision for the ways God answers the fundamental longings of the human heart.

Lastly, Barry’s sixth chapter explores how Ignatius’ approach to gospel contemplation helps a person move from gaining insights about the text to encountering Jesus experientially. Barry outlines two main components of Ignatian contemplation that facilitate this process of encounter. The first is Ignatius’ invitation for people to use their imagination when interacting with a text. Barry argues that the purpose of utilizing the

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17 Ibid., 22.
18 Ibid., 25.
imagination is to help people enter the story and discover how they respond to God.19 The second component of Ignatian contemplation that facilitates encounter is the act of noticing and savoring the key experiences that occur when engaging with the text. In the Exercises, Ignatius invites people to reflect back on their encounter with scripture and to notice their affective responses.

Limitations

William Barry offers some helpful insights into some of the issues people need to work through before embarking on the Spiritual Exercises; however, he does not provide a lot of specific examples or practices that facilitate this preparation. For example, he pinpoints the necessity of working through past hurts, dysfunctional images of God, and disordered desires, but he does not offer many examples as to how a director of the Exercises might help a person with these issues. He names the needs but leaves it to retreat directors to come up with a plan to address the needs.


James Martin is a Jesuit priest who works in New York City as a writer, editor, and a spiritual director. In *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, Martin argues Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation provides “a guide to discovering how God can

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19 Ibid., 81.

be found in every dimension of your life.”²¹ Martin’s thesis is that Ignatian spirituality supports this holistic approach to spirituality by emphasizing four main characteristics: “Finding God in all things, being a contemplatives in action, looking at the world in an incarnational way, and seeking freedom and detachment.”²²

Main Argument

Martin unpacks these four main dimensions of Ignatian spirituality and shows how they facilitate a deeper integration between spirituality and life. First, Martin explores Ignatius’ emphasis on finding God in all things. Martin writes, “Ignatian spirituality considers everything an important element of your life. That includes religious services, sacred Scriptures, prayer, and charitable works, to be sure, but it also includes friends, family, work, relationships, sex, suffering, and joy, as well as nature, music, and pop culture.”²³ Martin suggests that the Ignatian prayer of examen facilitates a deeper awareness of how God is at work in our everyday life. He writes, “The examen helps you to “realize” the presence of God. For me, it transcends any proofs for the existence of God by asking you to notice where God already exists in your life.”²⁴

The second dimension of Ignatian spirituality that Martin explores is being “contemplatives in action.” Martin writes, “While Ignatius counseled his Jesuits always to carve out time for prayer, they were expected to lead active lives.” He continues, “In

²¹ Ibid., 7.
²² Ibid., 10.
²³ Ibid., 5.
²⁴ Ibid., 102.
the midst of our activity we can allow a contemplative stance to inform our actions. Instead of seeing the spiritual life as one that can exist only if it is enclosed by the walls of a monastery, Ignatius asks you to see the world as your monastery." Martin unpacks this element of Ignatian spirituality by showing how Ignatius helps people discern God’s leading in their lives and integrate spirituality at work and in the community.

Third, Martin argues that the Ignatian emphasis on finding God in all things, and being contemplatives in action, is undergirded by Ignatius’ theological emphasis on the incarnation. Martin explains, “Christian theology holds that God became human, or ‘incarnate,’ in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. (The word incarnation comes from the Latin root carn, for ‘flesh.’)” He explains how the incarnation informs the spiritual life writing, “An incarnational spirituality means believing that God can be found in the everyday events of our lives. God is not just out there. God is right here, too.”

Lastly, Martin argues Ignatian spirituality seeks to lead people toward freedom and detachment. Martin writes, “When Ignatius says that we should be ‘detached,’ he’s talking about not being tied down by unimportant things.” Martin argues that one of the key purposes of the Exercises is to help people experience detachment from ‘disordered affections,’ which he describes as anything that prevents people from being free to follow God. Martin expands on this theme halfway through the book where he discusses the

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25 Ibid., 8.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 9.
28 Ibid.
freedom that comes through simplicity, and the need to be properly detached from ‘disordered affections’ in order to respond to God’s leading in life.

Relevance to Topic

James Martin’s book intersects with this project in a number of ways. The four emphases that Martin draws from the Ignatian tradition speak directly to some of desired outcomes of this project. This project explores whether Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation facilitates an increased ability to discover God in everyday life, an increased freedom from disordered attachments, and increased desire to serve God. Martin explores these four themes in depth and explains how Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation leads to these desired outcomes.

Martin’s book also informs this project’s interest by providing a contextually sensitive approach to spiritual formation in the post-Christian context. In his second chapter he addresses the spiritual struggles of those who have left the church, struggle with disbelief, or consider themselves “spiritual-but-not-religious.” He argues that Ignatian spirituality intersects with the longings of those who are questioning traditional religion by emphasizing the role that experience plays in the spiritual journey. At the same time Martin challenges the ‘spiritual-but-not-religious’ crowd to recognize the need for accountability to a religious tradition. He writes:

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29 Ibid., 174-212.
30 Ibid., 306-308.
31 Ibid., 38.
“While ‘spiritual’ is obviously healthy, “not religious” may be another way of saying that faith is something between you and God. And while faith is a question of you and God, it’s not just a question of you and God. Because this would mean that you, alone, are relating to God. And that means there’s no one to suggest when you might be off track.\(^{32}\)

Martin affirms the spiritual longings of post-modern people, yet warns against the pitfalls of individualism and selfishness that can often characterize a spirituality detached from a community of faith.

Lastly, Martin’s discussion on contemplation in action speaks to this project’s emphasis on how Ignatian spiritual formation promotes redemptive missional engagement in the world. In his thirteenth chapter, Martin speaks at length about the way Ignatian spirituality can help people discern their calling, live out their spiritual values in the workplace, and inform how they engage the poor and the marginalized in society.

Limitations

The main limitation of Martin’s book, for this project, is that he describes Ignatian spirituality in broader terms than this project seeks to do. This project focuses primarily on Ignatius’ approach to prayer and spiritual formation as outlined in his *Spiritual Exercises*. Martin, on the other hand, presents a bigger perspective on Ignatian spirituality that references not only Ignatius, but also the whole Jesuit tradition. He states that his understanding of Ignatian spirituality, “is based on an approach found in [Ignatius’] own writings as well as in the traditions, practices, and spiritual know-how passed down by

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 46.
Jesuit priests and brothers from generation to generation." When Martin defines the nature of Ignatian spirituality he often considers other Jesuit writers on par with Ignatius himself. When interacting with this source it is important to decipher between Ignatius’ vision and the broader Jesuit vision for the spiritual life.

The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Everyday Life, by Kevin O’Brien

Kevin O’Brien is a Jesuit priest, writer, and retreat director. In The Ignatian Adventure, Kevin O’Brien writes a contemporary commentary on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, and provides an outline for a thirty-two week version of the Exercises, that are to be implemented into daily life. His thesis statement reads, “The genius and beauty of the Exercises is that we learn to weave our own life narrative into the life story of Jesus Christ in such a way that both become more vivid and interconnected . . . The Exercises do this by helping me become freer of all the interior clutter that gets in the way of reaching this graced awareness.”

Main Argument

O’Brien begins by giving an overview of Ignatian spirituality and the purpose of the Exercises. He argues that the purpose of the Exercises is:

33 Ibid., 1.


to grow in union with God, who frees us to make good decisions about our lives and to “help souls.” Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ. The Exercises help us grow in interior freedom from sin and disordered loves so that we can respond more generously to God’s call in our life.\textsuperscript{36}

In this statement, O’Brien weaves together three interrelated purposes—union, freedom, and response. As a person grows closer to union with God, they can find freedom from disordered affections and respond to God’s call.

O’Brien proceeds to explain Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation in the \textit{Exercises}. He writes, “In the Exercises, we pray with Scripture; we do not study it. Although Scripture study is central to any believer’s faith, we leave for another time extended biblical exegesis and theological investigation.”\textsuperscript{37} O’Brien explains the specifics of how Ignatius invites people to pray with the scriptures through the practices of meditation and contemplation. He also emphasizes how Ignatius leaves room for adaptation and flexibility. O’Brien writes, “Ignatius’ own conversion taught him that God works with each person uniquely, so he insisted that the Exercises be adapted to meet the particular needs of the one making them. The goal is drawing closer to God, not mechanically running through all of the exercises in order.”\textsuperscript{38}

After introducing the purpose and process of the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}, O’Brien provides an adaptation of the \textit{Exercises} to be implemented in daily life. He spreads the entire \textit{Exercises} over a thirty-two-day period. He follows the outline of the original \textit{Exercises} but adds six weeks of preparatory exercises.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 19.
\end{itemize}
Relevance to Topic

O’Brien’s book contributes to the praxis component of my project in a number of ways. First, *The Ignatian Adventure* provides practical insights for how directors can implement the *Exercises* into daily life. He is particularly helpful in explaining how the *Exercises* need to be adapted to different situations. Unlike some versions of the nineteenth annotation of the *Exercises*, he leaves enough room in his retreat to contextualize it for different people. As he writes, “The goal is God, not the book!”\(^{39}\)

Second, O’Brien provides helpful material for the preparatory exercises. His book includes a six-week introductory retreat that suggests ideas for how to introduce people to Ignatian prayer and prepare them to embark on the entire *Exercises*. In these preparatory exercises he invites people to consider their image of God, explore their vision for the spiritual life, learn the basic rhythms of Ignatian prayer, and begin to confront their disordered affections. These notes help inform the content of the Encounter retreat.

O’Brien’s commentary on the *Exercises* also supports the theological vision of this project. He shows how the *Exercises* help people move beyond insight towards a transformative encounter with God. He writes, “Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ.”\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) Ibid, 26.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 14.
Limitations

O’Brien’s book is heavily influenced by his own experience of the *Exercises*. In fact, throughout the book he writes about his own experiences at each stage of the *Exercises*. While this provides a helpful example of how the *Exercises* continues to be relevant in contemporary culture, it is limited by the fact that it is just one person’s experience. It runs the danger of making his experience normative. Also, while he provides one helpful model of the nineteenth annotation of the *Exercises*, other helpful models exist. I will need to bring this resource into conversation with other approaches to the nineteenth annotation in order to provide a more holistic introduction to Ignatian spiritual formation. Finally, O’Brien writes from a Jesuit perspective and does not speak to the challenges of adapting the *Exercises* to a Protestant context.

_Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, by James Wakefield_ 41

James Wakefield’s *Sacred Listening* is a contemporary adaptation of the nineteenth annotation of *Spiritual Exercises*, which is specifically geared towards a Protestant audience. He describes the purpose of the book as follows:

*Sacred Listening* is an adaptation of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola for contemporary people with little or no formal training in spiritual disciplines. This adaptation accommodates a regular work schedule, highlights the scriptural inferences of the original Exercises, incorporates small revisions to avoid unnecessarily alienating Protestants, and allows for use with small groups. 42

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42 Ibid., chap. 1, Kindle.
Wakefield develops an approach to the *Exercises* that engages contemporary people and engages the theological perspectives of Protestants.

Main Argument

In part one of *Sacred Listening* Wakefield provides an introduction to the *Spiritual Exercises*. He describes the purpose of the *Exercises* as “an invitation to renew and deepen our relationship with Christ,” and summarizes the content of the *Exercises* as “primarily a series of meditations on the Gospels that help us clarify and deepen our commitments to Jesus Christ.”  
Wakefield provides a brief overview of Ignatius’ life and outlines the content of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He summarizes the process of the *Exercises* saying, “Ignatius invites us into the story of Jesus and calls us to be transformed by our participation in the story. With our imagination and reason, with our five bodily senses, and especially with our emotions, we become secondhand witnesses of the events of Scripture.”  
Wakefield suggests that the ultimate goal of the *Spiritual Exercises* “is to grow in responsive spiritual freedom. We seek freedom from our past, and we seek freedom from present constraints on our loving response to God.”

Wakefield provides instructions for how to go about making the *Spiritual Exercises*. He gives an overview of Ignatian scripture meditation, imaginative contemplation, and discernment. He also gives practical advice on how to organize daily

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43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
prayer sessions, keep a prayer journal, deal with resistance and dryness in prayer, and participate in contemplative listening relationships.

Part two of the book includes the content for the daily prayer assignments. The assignments are organized around four movements, which follow the basic outline of the original *Exercises*. The first movement “leads disciples to discover the necessity for God’s unmerited forgiveness and mercy.” The daily practices focus on meditating on the love and mercy of God, confessing sin, and reflecting on Ignatius’ ‘Principle and Foundation.’ The second movement “leads us to an appreciation of the humanity of Christ and by this to an identification with his goals, values, and methods.” The content of this movement is focused on imaginative contemplation on the gospels. Wakefield suggests that the focus of this movement is for disciples to evaluate their commitment to following Christ. The third movement “calls disciples to contemplate the obedience and suffering of Christ— to appreciate the price of redemption and so count the cost of our discipleship.” Finally, the fourth movement “leads us to strengthen our attachment to Christ. It begins tenuously, as we are asked to wrestle with the improbability of the resurrection. The discovery of a new and profound joy— the reality of the resurrection— resurrection— draws us to ask, “How can I live before so great a King?” Wakefield organizes these four movements over a twenty-four week period.

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
Relevance to Topic

*Sacred Listening* provides a helpful example of how to contextualize the *Spiritual Exercises* to a Protestant audience. One of the ways Wakefield adapts the *Exercises* for Protestants is by making connections between the *Exercises* and scripture. For example, Wakefield shows how the content of Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation lines up with the key themes in the book of Philippians.\(^50\) Wakefield also anticipates the concerns Protestants might have with the Ignatian emphasis on imaginative contemplation. He argues that the writers of the gospel encouraged imaginative contemplation by their use of the historic present tense.\(^51\) Another way that Wakefield contextualizes the *Exercises* is by making revisions to the original text that might be called into question by Protestants. In the original text, for example, Ignatius invites people to pray for a sense of shame regarding their sin.\(^52\) Wakefield revises this language by inviting people to pray for confusion and sorrow over their sin.\(^53\) Wakefield seeks to place Ignatius’ teaching on sin in the broader context of God’s love and mercy, thereby honoring the Protestant emphasis on salvation by grace through faith.

*Sacred Listening* is also helpful to the development of this project by offering a model for leading the *Exercises* in a group context. Wakefield provides an overview of how to train people to be contemplative listeners to each other. He casts a vision for the ministry of listening, provides an overview of what is expected from listeners, and

\(^{50}\) Ibid.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., chap. 2, Kindle.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., chap. 5, Kindle.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
identifies potential control issues that can prevent people from listening well. These insights will be invaluable when training people to participate in the contemplative sharing groups envisioned in this project’s Encounter retreat.

**Limitations**

I am intimately acquainted with Wakefield’s format of the *Spiritual Exercises*, as I used his book as the basis for my own journey through the *Exercises*. There are two main limitations that I encountered in Wakefield’s text. First, *Sacred Listening* sometimes lacks the flexibility that Ignatius calls for in the original *Exercises*. Wakefield’s format is very prescriptive. He does not leave a lot of room for repetition of meaningful exercises or give people options to choose from depending on what they are experiencing in prayer. Second, I found Wakefield’s format for beginning prayer to be distracting rather than centering. Wakefield encourages people to begin their daily prayer by reflecting on how they experienced the previous day’s grace throughout their day. This seems to conflate scripture meditation and the prayer of examen. Ignatius encourages implementing the prayer of examen at the end of the day and sees this as a something separate from scripture meditation. I personally found that starting the daily exercises with a look back on the previous day did not facilitate a helpful centering process for meditation and contemplation.

**Conclusion**

These six resources provide helpful direction for the development of this project. Having provided a review of pertinent theological literature, I now develop a theological
vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in the local church. The next
chapter develops a theology of the church and explores how the *Exercises*, might support
the church in fulfilling its mission.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXERCISES AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The next two chapters develop a theological vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in the local church. This chapter takes a wide-angle look at the theology of the local church in general. It explores the nature of the church, the mission of the church, and the way an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation supports the church’s mission. The next chapter takes a close-up look at the theology behind Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation; exploring how it facilitates the transformation of the human heart.

There are two reasons why the theological vision for this project begins with a broad overview of the theology of the church. First, this project is implemented in a local church setting; therefore, it is important to explore how this project aligns with the mission of the church. Second, exploring how Ignatian spiritual formation aligns with the mission of the church honors one of Ignatius’ priorities raised in his Exercises. Ignatius believed the Exercises had the potential to support the local church, which is evidenced by the fact that he ends his Exercises with a list of guidelines for how people ought to relate to the church at the conclusion of their retreat. Commenting on these guidelines,
David Fleming writes, “St. Ignatius was convinced that a man or woman who makes the thirty-day Exercises would be taking on a more active and concerned role in the life of the Church.”¹ In his second guideline for relating to the church, Ignatius encourages participants of the Exercises to increase their involvement with the church. He writes, “We should praise and reverence the sacramental life in the Church, especially encouraging a more personal involvement and a more frequent participation in the celebration of the Eucharist and of the sacrament of reconciliation.”² Ignatius emphasizes the need for a participation in the community of faith because he believes the corporate aspect of faith supports a healthy spirituality. In the thirteenth guideline he writes, “In general we should be more open to acknowledge the limitations of our own individual opinion than to scorn the light of the Spirit’s action with the tradition and communal vision of a church which is described as truly catholic.”³ Humble participation in the local church protects people from the limitations of their individual perspective and opens them up to ways in which the Spirit works through the community of faith. Therefore, while Ignatius’ Exercises primarily focus on a personal journey of spiritual formation, he affirms the need for participants to connect with the local church.

To clearly understand the way Ignatian spirituality becomes congruent with the church, it is important to understand the nature and mission of the church. The first section of this chapter provides a definition of the church. Various perspectives on the


² Ibid., 281.

³ Ibid., 287.
nature of the church are explained and evaluated. The second section explores the mission of the church. The third section explores how the ministry initiative proposed in this project supports the church’s mission.

**The Nature of the Church**

Theologian Stanley Grenz suggests that there are three dominant perspectives about nature of the church in the Christian tradition.⁴ The succession perspective, promoted by the Roman Catholic Church, says the church exists where the people of God are associated with the tradition and leadership that has succeeded from the apostles. The proclamation perspective, associated with the Reformed and Lutheran tradition, says the church exists wherever the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered. This perspective emerged in response to the concern the reformers had with the institutional church in the fifteenth century. They saw that, while marks of succession could be present, the gospel message could still be distorted. Therefore, the reformers so they sought to locate the true church in the message as opposed to the institution. Lastly, the covenantal perspective suggests the church is the gathering of people who have come into a relationship with Christ. This view was put forward by the radical reformers and developed by the Puritans.

The New Testament description of the church favors the covenantal perspective. The word used to describe the church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. The word *ekklesia* was used in the first century Roman world to describe an assembly of people

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who came together to make civil decisions.⁵ The Septuagint also uses the word *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, which refers to an assembly or congregation.⁶ In both cases, the word *ekklesia* describes a gathering a people. Therefore, the New Testament appropriation of the term *ekklesia*, suggests the early Christians defined the church as the people of God.

The metaphors used to describe the church in the New Testament reinforce the idea that the church is to be understood as the people of God.⁷ For example, in 1 Peter 2:9 the writer addresses the Christian church as, “A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.” Here the writer of 1 Peter says the Christian church fulfills the role initially given to the Jewish nation by being God’s chosen people. Paul also uses imagery describing the church as a gathering of people. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 Paul describes the church as the body made up of many parts that work together under the direction of Jesus, who functions as the head. This metaphor suggests the church is a united body of believers who are connected together through their common belief in Jesus. The New Testament writers also address the local church as the temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:19-21; 1 Pt 2:5). In the Old Testament, the physical temple was understood a place where God resided (Chr 6:1-2). In the New Testament, the people make up the “living stones” of the temple and constitute a “spiritual house,” where God resides (1 Pt 2:5). In

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⁵ Ibid., 465.

⁶ Ibid., 464-65.

⁷ This overview is drawn from Paul Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 190-91.
this metaphor, the people replace a building. The New Testament pictures the church as a gathering of people empowered by the presence of God.

While the covenantal perspective of the church is to be favored, the emphasis on proclamation and succession have their place. Stanley Grenz argues for a “balanced congregationalism” that defines the church as the people of God, but recognizes the people are formed by the proclamation of the gospel and the tradition that precedes them. Grenz uses the term congregationalism as a synonym for covenant people, emphasizing how the church is made up of the people of God who congregate together. Grenz writes,

Congregationalism asserts that ultimately the essence of the true church lies with its people. Yet the *ekklesia* is no ordinary collection of persons, rather, because the church has been called out of the world by the preaching of the gospel in order to live in covenant, it is constituted by people with a special consciousness. . . We [also] participate in a fellowship that has already enjoyed a covenantal history. This realization balances the older congregationalist assertion that the believer is logically prior to the church. Rather than focusing on the primacy of either, we must balance the individual and corporate aspects of the Christian church.

The church is a gathering of people who are in a covenant relationship with God; however, the nature of the covenant community is defined by the proclamation of the gospel and the tradition from which it succeeds. Thus, the three perspectives on the nature of the church are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can support each other.

In summary, the church can best be defined as a gathering of people who are in covenant with God. The terminology and metaphors used to describe the church in the New Testament support this definition. This perspective of the church is preferable to the

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8 Grenz, *Theology For the Community*, 471.

9 Ibid.
succession perspective, which locates the church in the tradition and leadership that has succeeded from the apostles, and the proclamation perspective, which defines the church as an institution where the gospel is properly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered. While the church should be defined as the covenant people of God, this perspective should be balanced with the insights from the succession and proclamation perspectives. The community of believers is no ordinary gathering of people; rather, they are a people shaped by the proclamation of the gospel and the tradition preceding them. With this clarity about the fundamental nature of the church established, the next section considers the mission given to the covenant people of God.

**The Mission of the Church**

The church has been empowered by God with a specific mission. Two texts are particularly important for understanding the church’s mission—the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 and the Great Commandment in Mark 12:30-31. In the Great Commission Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to make other disciples. The Great Commandment, however, clarifies what a disciple is. In the Great Commandment, Jesus quotes the *shema* from Leviticus 19:16, saying the most important commandment is to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.” Here Jesus speaks of two dimensions of the spiritual life—loving God and loving others.

The order of Jesus’ Great Commandment is significant. The capacity for effective love of neighbor is contingent on participating in the love of God. Jesus articulates this in John 15, where he likens his disciples to branches that must be connected to a vine. In
order to bear good fruit, disciples must “abide” in Christ. Jesus says, “apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4). A disciple’s primary role is to remain connected to the love of God, from which they are empowered to love others. Thomas Ashbrook articulates that a disciples “first order calling” is to love God, which makes it possible to attend to their “second order calling” of loving others and making other disciples.  

Dallas Willard also argues that spiritual formation precedes effective outreach, stating it is “a serious error to make outreach a primary goal of the local congregation, especially so when those who are already ‘with us’ have not become clear-headed and devoted apprentices of Jesus.” He argues outreach will be ineffective if the church does not attend to the formation of the people they are seeking to send out into the world. Willard asserts, “The most successful work of outreach would be the work of inreach that turns people, wherever they are, into lights in the darkened world.”

The first order calling of the church community, then, is to facilitate the formation of disciples who love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. Paul speaks to this in Ephesians 4:11-13 writing, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” The church equips people for ministry, fosters spiritual


12 Ibid., 244.
maturity, and enables disciples to live out of the fullness of Christ. The various leadership roles in the church are called to facilitate the deepening formation of its members.

One of the significant ways the church helps its people develop their first order calling of loving God is through the practice of worship. To worship is to ascribe worth to something. Through worship, the church lifts up the name of God and praises God for what he has done. The psalmist calls the people to “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” (Ps 29:1). Worship is directed towards God. The community of faith praises God and thereby remembers God and what God has done.

Public worship has always held a central role in the ministry of the church. When the early church was first formed after Pentecost, the people committed to worshipping together. Acts 2:42-45 says that the people gathered regularly together for teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer and praising God. Paul testifies to the centrality of public worship in the early church in 1 Corinthians 14:26, suggesting that people gathered together regularly to sing hymns and hear the proclamation of the word.

The practice of worship facilitates spiritual formation. James K.A. Smith writes, “We become what we worship because what we worship is what we love.” Smith argues that the practice of Christian worship reshapes the desires of our hearts from the things of the world to the things of God. He writes, “Christian worship, we should recognize, is essentially a counter-formation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings,

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13 Grenz, Theology for the Community, 491.

14 James K.A. Smith, You are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 22.
miscalibrating them, orienting us to rival versions of the good life. This is why worship is the heart of discipleship.”

Smith argues that the act of worship facilitates the reorientation of human desiring. As people worship God, they cultivate a desire for the things of God. Stanley Grenz makes a similar point. He suggests the church glorifies God not because God is a “cosmic egotist,” but because the glorification of his loving nature shapes his people to “mirror for all creation the divine character and essence.”

As the church praises the triune God for His love, the church begins to embody that love. Theologian Ralph Martin describes worship as “the dramatic celebration of God in his supreme worth in such a manner that his ‘worthiness’ becomes the norm and inspiration of human living.” Through worship, people dwell on the love of God, which shapes and inspires how they live their lives.

People also develop their first order calling to have a transformative love relationship with God through other means besides corporate worship. Dallas Willard writes, “We must flatly say that one of the greatest barriers to meaningful spiritual formation in Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of ‘regular church services,’ of whatever kind they may be. Though they are vital, they are not enough.”

Willard envisions a holistic approach to spiritual formation that includes teaching, engagement with personal spiritual practices, accountability and fellowship with other

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15 Ibid., 25.

16 Grenz, Theology for the Community, 489.

17 Quoted in Ibid., 491.

18 Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 250.
believers, and participation in ministry.  

Spiritual maturity results from a sustained abiding in the love of God, which requires more than a weekly worship service. Richard Foster makes a similar point in his book *Celebration of Discipline.* Foster names twelve disciplines central to the Christian faith. These include the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude submission, and service; and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Foster argues that as people engage in these diverse spiritual disciplines, they experience a transformative encounter with Christ. He writes, “God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.” In order to help people live into their first order calling of loving God, the church must provide regular opportunities for people to abide in the love of God through a variety of different spiritual disciplines.

As disciples are transformed by their relationship with God, they are then empowered to attend to their second order calling of reaching out to others. The New Testament consistently emphasizes outreach. In John 20:21 Jesus says to his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” God does not want his disciples to remain huddled inside the four walls of the church but to go out into the world. Jesus calls his people the “light of the world” (Mt 5:14). This light is not to be hidden but is to “shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:15). In Matthew 28:18 he commissions his disciples to “go into all the world and make

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19 Ibid., 244-251.


21 Ibid., 7.
disciples of all nations.” Again, in Acts 1:11 Jesus says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The church not only helps people grow deeper in their own relationship with God; it also calls people to engage in mission.

The church’s outreach is multifaceted. The Great Commission emphasis on making disciples suggests there is evangelistic element to the church’s mission. The church is sent out to share the good news about Jesus, enfold people into the life of the church, and help them become disciples of Christ. Jesus desires to draw all people to himself. In John 10:16 he says, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” God sends his people out into the world to proclaim the gospel and draw others into the community of faith, so they too can be disciples.

The church also reaches out by embodying the values of the kingdom of God. Jesus uses the word ‘gospel’ to describe the in-breaking kingdom of God.22 Dallas Willard defines the kingdom of God as, “the present, available, direct rule of God offered to humanity in the life of Jesus.”23 Jesus came to usher in a new way to live and his disciples can begin to participate in this new reality in the present. This kingdom encompasses more than individual reconciliation to God. The kingdom of God is marked by good news for the poor and oppressed (Lk 4:18-19), hope that “all of creation will be set free from its bondage to decay” (Rm 8), and ultimately the restoration of all creation (Rv 21:5). Stanley Grenz argues the church fulfills its mission by prefiguring the

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23 Ibid.
kingdom of God. He writes, “The identity of the church in the world does not focus merely on bringing [people] into the fold . . . Rather, at its heart is the gospel of modeling in the present the glorious human fellowship that will come at the consummation of history. The church acts as a sign of the kingdom.” Gabe Lyons, a contemporary thought leader for the missional church movement, shows what this looks like on a practical level. He writes, “Instead of simply waiting for God to unveil the new heaven and the new earth, the rest of us can give the world a taste of what God’s kingdom is all about—building up, repairing brokenness, showing mercy, reinstating hope, and generally adding value. In this expanded model, everyone plays an essential role.”

Lyons references an expanded model of outreach that includes evangelism as well as working toward the common good of society. The church engages in acts of justice, compassion, and restoration in the world, thereby enacting God’s plan for the reconciliation and restoration of all things.

Over the last couple of decades, the evangelical church in North America has emphasized the missional dimension of the church. Timothy Keller observes, “An entire generation of younger evangelical leaders has grown up searching for the true missional church as if for the Holy Grail. Seemingly a dozen books come out each year with the word missional in their title.” The renewed emphasis on mission is partly in response in response the decline of membership and influence of the institutional church in the Western world. For many centuries, Christianity was the dominant religion in the West.

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Today, however, the church is increasingly becoming a minority voice in culture. Mission experts have recognized that the mission field is now in our own back yard. For example, missiologist Lesslie Newbigin writes, “The traditional sending agencies, have, in general, totally failed to recognize that the most urgent contemporary mission field is to be found in their own traditional heartlands, and that the most aggressive paganism with which they have to engage is the ideology that now controls the ‘developed’ world.”26 The missional church movement responds to this reality by inspiring the church to become outwardly focused and engaged in an increasingly post-Christian society. Theologian Darrell Guder casts the vision of a missional church as follows, “The church’s task of announcing the reign of God will mean moving beyond the four walls of the church building, out of the safe group of people who know and love each other, into the public square. The missional church will be in the world with the good news.”27 Missional churches emphasize the importance of living out the gospel in the world.

The missional church movement is right to call the church to attend to the work of outreach. Timothy Keller notes that when Christianity was the dominant and official religion in the West, “You could afford to train people solely in prayer, bible study and evangelism – skills for their private lives – because they were not facing radically non-Christian values in their public lives.”28 Now, however, Keller argues that the church needs to equip people to rethink how to engage a predominantly post-Christian culture.


28 Keller, Center Church, 260.
He continues, “In a missional church, all people need theological education to ‘think Christianly’ about everything and to act with Christian distinctiveness.” Keller argues, that one of the central tasks of the church in a post-Christian context is to equip people to live out their faith in daily life by acting on the love of God, not just talking about it; caring for poor, not just preaching about it.

While it is important for the church to emphasize the missional dimension of its calling in a post-Christian context, the contemporary church must not lose sight of the importance of forming disciples beyond just making them. Mike Breen, pastor and founder of the discipleship movement 3DM, argues that discipleship has become underemphasized in the missional church movement. He argues the church needs to reprioritize discipleship in the local church if it is to be effective in reaching out to the world. He writes,

People want to create missional churches or missional programs or missional small groups. The problem is that we don’t have a “missional” problem or a leadership problem in the Western church. We have a discipleship problem. If you know how to disciple people well, you will always get mission. . . . Somewhere along the way we started separating being “missional” from being a disciple, as if somehow the two could be separated. Pastors started saying they didn’t want to be inwardly-focused so they stopped investing in the people in their churches so they could focus on people outside their churches. Granted, we should focus on people who don’t know Jesus yet, but Jesus himself gave us the model for doing that: Disciple people.  

The church is called to be out in the world engaging in evangelism and service, but effective outreach is contingent on healthy discipleship. In order to truly love others, one

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29 Ibid.

30 Mike Breen, Building a Discipling Culture, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.
must first be shaped by the love of God. As the writer of 1 John states, “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

This section argues that the church consists of the body of believers who are drawn into a covenant relationship with God. The church is called to make disciples who are transformed by the love of God and sent out to participate in God’s mission in the world. The church facilitates spiritual transformation through corporate worship and personal spiritual practices. The church reaches out to the world through evangelism and by prefiguring the kingdom of God through acts of reconciliation, restoration, and service. A healthy church balances spiritual formation and missional engagement. Having provided an overview of the nature and mission of the local church, it is now explored how an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation can support the church in fulfilling its mission.

**The Ignatian Exercises and the Mission of the Church**

The Ignatian Exercises can support the church’s mission to make disciples who are transformed by the love of God, by providing an intensive season of meditation and prayer. As noted in the previous section, Dallas Willard argues effective spiritual formation requires more than participation in regular worship services.\(^{31}\) Willard suggests that the church should often provide opportunities for people “to be taken out of their ordinary routine and given lengthy periods of time in retreat, under careful direction.”\(^{32}\) He goes on to say, “This sort of intensive training is exactly what Jesus did in the

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\(^{32}\) Ibid.
spiritual formation of the selected [disciples].”\(^{33}\) Providing intensive seasons of spiritual formation mirrors Jesus’ approach to forming disciples in the gospels.

Dallas Willard sees very few models for intensive spiritual formation in the contemporary church. He writes, “At the present time intentional, effective training in Christlikeness – within the framework of a clear-eyed apprenticeship commitment and a spiritual ‘engulfment’ in the Trinitarian reality—is just not there for us.”\(^{34}\) Willard believes that successful training program must include two key primary objectives. The first objective is “to bring apprentices to the point where they dearly love and constantly delight in that “heavenly Father” made real to earth in Jesus.”\(^{35}\) The second objective is “to remove our automatic responses against the kingdom of God, to free the apprentices of domination, of ‘enslavement’ (Jn 8:34; Rom. 6:6), to their old habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and action.”\(^{36}\) Willard argues that the contemporary church needs an extensive program of spiritual formation that will open people up to the love of God and facilitate the removal of barriers that get in the way of living as committed disciples of Christ.

Willard’s goals of encountering God’s love and removing barriers that get in the way of following God align with Ignatius’ goals in his *Exercises*. To review, Ignatius states the purpose of the *Exercises* is, “For increasing openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, for helping to bring to light the darkness of sinfulfulness and sinful tendencies

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 313.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 321.

\(^{36}\) Ibid, 322.
within ourselves, and for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.” The Exercises are designed to help people experience freedom from their sinful tendencies so that they can whole-heartedly love God. The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation proposed in this project, then, has the potential fulfill an important need in the contemporary church. Ignatius provides an approach to formation that helps people encounter and respond to the love of God. The next chapter explores more fully how God can use the Ignatian Exercises to achieves these outcomes.

Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation also supports the church’s call to reach out to the world. Chapter one explored four specific ways the Spiritual Exercises support outreach. To review, the Exercises support missional engagement by motivating people to love others as they abide in the love of God, freeing people from attachments so they become ready to sacrificially and lovingly serve others, helping people integrate faith into everyday life through reflective prayer, and helping people discern how God is calling them to serve. Together, these aspects of the Ignatian Exercises have the potential to spark missional vigor. David Fleming suggests that one of Ignatius’ desired outcomes of the Exercises is for participants to be “set on fire with zeal,” which allows them to, “throw themselves wholeheartedly into the mission Jesus has for them.”

The history of Ignatius’ Jesuit order demonstrates that the Spiritual Exercises have inspired and supported effective missional engagement in the world. Each Jesuit

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37 Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship, 5.

38 See pages 31-40 of this project.

completes the entire Exercises twice during their novitiate formation. The purpose of Jesuit formation is to prepare people for active service in the world. The Jesuit order differs from other religious orders in that it is not monastic. Ignatius did not want Jesuits to be cloistered away from the world but to engage the culture in mission work. James Martin writes, “While Ignatius counseled his Jesuits always to carve out time for prayer, they were expected to lead active lives.”

The early Jesuits were sent out on missions around the world. Ignatius vision is for Jesuit missionaries to make an impact in society. He is known to end his letters to his Jesuit missionaries with the phrase, “Go set the world on fire.” Commenting on this saying, Jesuit scholar Jim Manney writes, “Ignatius wanted everyone to be set afire with the passion and zeal for the kingdom of God.”

This legacy of active engagement in the world continues among the Jesuits today. Pedro Arrupe was instrumental in facilitating a renewed commitment to social justice among the Jesuits in the twentieth century when he served as their Superior General. In one of his speeches he states:

Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ - for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the

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42 Ibid.

least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. 44

In the following years, the General Congregation of the Jesuits made the corporate commitment to social justice a central aspect of their mission. Jesuit scholar Peter Bison notes that the thirty-second General Congregation in 1975 “initiated a new commitment to social justice,” by promoting justice as an “absolute requirement.” 45 This resulted in numerous social justice initiatives among Jesuits around the world. Today there are fifty-nine different Jesuit social justice organizations in America alone. 46 The history of Jesuit engagement in missions, then, suggests that Ignatius’ *Exercises* have a long track record of forming people for intentional outreach in the world.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the nature of the church, the mission of the church, and the way an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation supports work of the church. The church is defined as a gathering of people who live in covenant with God. The covenant people of God are nourished by the proclamation of the word and the tradition passed down by the apostles. The people of God are endowed with two main callings. Their first calling is to participate in a transformative love relationship with God. This calling is nurtured through the practice of corporate worship and a commitment to the various


spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. As people are transformed by their encounter with the love of God, they are empowered to live out their second calling, which to participate in God’s mission in the world. The people of God are sent into the world to engage in evangelism and loving service. They seek to both enfold people into the community of faith and live out the values of the kingdom of God in the world. The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation proposed in this project has the potential to support the people of God in fulfilling both of these callings. Ignatius’ *Exercises* facilitates a transformative love relationship with God by providing an intensive time of spiritual discipline and meditation of the gospels. The *Exercises* also has the potential to inspire and support missional engagement with the world.

This chapter has provided a wide-angle look at the theology of the church. The next chapter takes a close up look at how the Ignatius’ *Exercises* facilitates the transformation of the heart. Having articulated that one of the key purposes of the local church is to facilitate a transformative love relationship with God, the next chapter looks specifically at how the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation facilitates this type of transformation.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXERCISES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART

This central argument of this project is that Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises helps people move from being theoretical observers to active participants in the kingdom of God. The goal of the Exercises is not to simply to profess accurate views about God but to encounter and respond to God as an active follower. David Fleming notes, “We may emerge from the Exercises with enhanced intellectual understanding, but this is not the goal. The goal is a response . . . Ignatius is after a response of the heart.”  

This chapter unpacks what it means to respond to God at the level of the heart, and how Ignatius’ Exercises facilitates this type of response. There are three sections in this chapter. The first section explores the biblical concept of the heart and the central role the heart plays in directing all other aspects of human life. It argues that Scripture promotes a more holistic approach to spiritual formation that seeks to transform not only the mind but also the desires of a person’s heart. The second section argues the Exercises aligns with the biblical perspective on spiritual formation by emphasizing the centrality of the heart in human transformation. The third section argues the three main forms of

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prayer taught in the *Exercises*—meditation, contemplation, and the prayer of examen—provide the means by which people encounter God, which facilitates the transformation of the heart.

**A Biblical Vision for Holistic Spiritual Formation**

The problem this project addresses is that the predominant approaches to discipleship in the contemporary church focus more on informing minds than transforming lives. As noted in the introduction, philosopher James K.A. Smith argues the predominance of the church’s informational approach to discipleship is heavily influenced by the philosophy of Rene’ Descartes. He writes, “In ways that are more ‘modern’ than biblical . . . many of us unwittingly share Rene Descartes’ definition of the essence of the human person as *res cogitans*, a ‘thinking thing.’”

Smith says the contemporary church’s appropriation of this “intellectualist model of the human person,” has created an approach to discipleship that “narrowly focuses on filling our intellectual wells with biblical knowledge, convinced that we can think our way to holiness—it is sanctification by information transfer.” While informational approaches to discipleship may do a good job of informing people about the basic tenants of the faith, they fail to transform how a person lives their life. Spiritual director Janet Ruffing observes that Christians often experience a gap between their espoused theology and their operative theology.

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3 Ibid., 4.

they often operate as if these doctrines are not actually true. When this rupture of intellectual belief and operative faith occurs, Christians miss out on experiencing the fullness of what the scriptures claim.

The scriptures present a more holistic view of spiritual formation. When asked to sum up the nature of the spiritual life Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself” (Lk10:27). Jesus depicts the spiritual life as a love relationship with God that encompasses a person’s heart, mind, soul, behavior, and interpersonal relationships. God is not simply a concept to be understood, but a being to be encountered and loved. In Galatians 5 Paul indicates that the fruit of a person’s encounter with God includes the affective experiences of love, joy and peace, and the behavior changes characterized by gentleness, patience, and self-control (Gal 5:22). The goal of spiritual formation cannot be limited to professing accurate views of God; rather, spiritual formation involves experiencing God and living out the implications of this experience.

Whereas the modern Cartesian worldview locates the center of the human being in the mind, the scriptures locate the center of the human being in the heart. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament defines kardia, the Greek word for the heart, as, “the center of the inner life of (human beings) and the source or seat of all the forces and functions of soul and spirit.” While contemporary people often associate the heart with feelings and emotions, the biblical concept of the heart is much broader. In Scripture the word for heart does encompasses feelings such as joy (Ac 2:26, Jn 16:22),

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and sorrow (Jn 16:6, 14:1, Rom 9:2), but it also as described as the part of the human person that orients and directs the will.\(^6\) When addressing the Pharisees, for example, Jesus says, “For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (Mk 7:21). For a positive example, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give.” The heart contains people’s desires and intentions, which directs their choices and actions. Dallas Willard uses the term heart and will interchangeably in order to emphasize how the heart directs all aspects of human functioning.\(^7\) James K.A. Smith defines the heart as “the fulcrum of your most fundamental longings – a visceral, subconscious orientation to the world.”\(^8\) Human action hinges on the fundamental desires of the heart. As noted in chapter one, Jesuit writer Pedro Arrupe captures this dynamic well, saying:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.\(^9\)

All of human life is directed by the desires of the human heart. The things that capture a person’s heart directs how they spend their time, what they invest in, and what they care about.

\(^6\) Ibid, 611.

\(^7\) Dallas Willard, Renovation Of The Heart, (Colorado Springs; Navpress, 2002), 29.

\(^8\) Smith, You Are What You Love, 8.

Jesus regularly speaks about the important role the heart plays in the life of discipleship. In Matthew 6, for example, he says, “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt 6:21). Here Jesus suggests that people are not solely driven by what they think but what their heart desires. Jesus emphasizes the centrality of the heart again in Matthew 15:8 saying, “These people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.” Jesus is not just interested in what people profess to believe but what they are seeking in their hearts. Jesus desires that his followers not simply profess faith in him but actually desire to follow him. Perhaps this is why Jesus asks two potential disciples to wrestle with the question, “What do you want?” (Jn 1:38). At the outset of the discipleship journey Jesus invites these men to examine their fundamental desires, for what their heart longs for will direct their lives.

Effective spiritual formation, then, must not only reorient what a person thinks but what a person desires in their heart. James Smith explains:

To be human is to be animated and oriented by some vision of the good life, some picture of what we think counts as “flourishing.” And we want that. We desire it. This is why our most fundamental mode of orientation to the world is love. We are oriented by our longings, directed by our desires. We adopt ways of life that are indexed to such visions of the good life, not usually because we ‘think through’ our options but rather because some picture captures our imaginations.\(^\text{10}\)

Smith argues that humans are not primarily driven by what they evaluate at a cognitive level, but by the deep longings that have capture their hearts. Therefore, effective spiritual formation must address the reorientation of the longings of the heart. Smith continues:

\(^{10}\) Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 11.
Discipleship is a rehabituation of your loves. This means that discipleship is more a matter of reformation than of acquiring information. The learning that is fundamental to Christian formation is affective and erotic, a matter of ‘aiming’ our loves, or orienting our desires to God and what God desires for his creation.”

Effective spiritual formation involves reorienting the human desires towards God. Dallas Willard makes a similar point in his book *Renovation of the Heart*. He uses the acronym V.I.M to outline his model of spiritual formation, which stands for vision, intention and means.\(^\text{11}\) He argues that effective spiritual formation begins with people capturing a vision for following Jesus and having a deep intention to pursue the vision. If a person’s heart has not been captured by a vision for life with God and does not form a deep intention to pursue that vision, then he or she will not engage in means available for spiritual growth.

In summary, while the predominant models of discipleship in the contemporary church focus on changing a person’s mind, the New Testament emphasizes the importance of changing a person’s heart. The heart in the New Testament encompasses the center of the human person. The heart is the seat of human desiring that orients and directs a person’s life. Effective spiritual formation helps people reorient their desires towards God by inviting them to encounter God’s love and capture a vision of what life with God is like. The next section argues the Ignatian *Exercises* shares this New Testament emphasis on the centrality of the heart, and facilitates the reorientation of the heart by helping people encounter God at an affective level.

Ignatian Insights into the Transformation of the Heart

The reorientation of the hearts desires lies at the core of Ignatius’ vision for the spiritual life in his Spiritual Exercises. In his Principle and Foundation, he writes:

We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God. Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me.\(^\text{12}\)

Here, Ignatius emphasizes the central role human desiring plays in following God. The goal of spiritual formation is to make a deepening relationship with God the central desire of the human heart. This requires that people confront the disordered desires that drive life. Ignatius writes, “The structure of these exercises has the purpose of leading people to true spiritual freedom. We grow into this freedom by gradually bringing an order into our lives so that we find that at a moment of choice or decision we are not swayed by a disordered love.”\(^\text{13}\) Disordered desires for things like wealth, status, or power sway people away from the values of the kingdom of God; therefore, the ability to follow God requires freedom from disordered desires and a renewed desire for God.

The role the reorientation of desire plays in spiritual formation is illustrated in Ignatius’ own experience. Ignatius had a profound conversion experience during a time of recovery after he was injured while fighting as a soldier during the battle of Pamplona. His autobiography captures this moment as follows:

When he thought of worldly matters, he found much delight; but after growing weary and dismissing them, he found that he was dry and unhappy. But when he thought of going barefoot to Jerusalem and eating nothing but herbs and of

\(^{12}\) Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship, 27.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 23.
imitating the . . . he not only found consolation in these thoughts, but even after they had left him he remained happy and joyful.  

Ignatius notices a dryness or restlessness as he contemplates the things of the world. However, when he imagines following the pattern of the saints he experienced a deep sense of consolation. He discovered what his heart was really longing for, and this desire shaped the direction of the rest of his life. This experience set his life on a trajectory that ultimately lead him to give his life in service to God and to start the Jesuit order. His experience of consolation became the driving force for turning to God. Ignatius’ conversion does not happen solely by thinking things through, but by attending to his deep experience of consolation as he ponders following God.

Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation is deeply shaped by his experience. He encourages people to get in touch with their affective experiences of God. Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au explain that Ignatius invites people to engage in a “form of knowing that goes beyond cold rationality. This mode of knowing is reflected in the Hebrew verb yahad, signifying the kind of intimate knowledge resulting from the unification of intellect, feeling, and action. Ignatian spirituality speaks of it as sentir, a felt knowledge that pervades the whole of one’s being.” Ignatius believes that people’s hearts are directed as they get in touch with their affective experience of God. He emphasizes this in his rules of discernment. He argues the Holy Spirit can be discerned through the experience of consolation. Ignatius describes this experience as follows:

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14 Ignatius, A Pilgrim's Journey, chap. 1, Kindle.

I call it consolation when some interior movement in the soul is caused, through which the soul comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord. I call consolation every increase in hope, faith, and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts to heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, quieting it and giving it peace in its Creator and Lord.  

Ignatius uses affective language here. He suggests that an interior movement marked by love, hope, faith, joy and peace accompanies the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Speaking from the Ignatian tradition, Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner asserts that without openness to and awareness of their affective spiritual experiences, people’s faith will fail to transform their lives. He writes, “If we do not learn slowly in this way to enter more and more into the company of God and to be open to him . . . if we do not develop such experiences, then our religious life is and remains really of a secondary character and its conceptual-thematic expression is false.” Rahner goes on to say, “Whenever piety is directed only by an ingenious, complicated intellectuality and conceptuality, it is really a pseudo piety, however profound it seems to be.” Here Rahner argues that a faith that is understood conceptually but never encountered experientially leads to a “pseudo piety” or a false religiosity that does not live out authentic love for God and neighbor. Therefore, Rahner concludes, “Knowing God is more important than knowing about God.” An intimate encounter with God is more important than a conceptual awareness of God. As William Barry articulates, “We do not know and love and serve an

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18 Ibid., 63.

abstraction.”⁰²⁰ People do not fall in love with an abstract concept; they fall in love with a person. The transformation of the heart requires that people become aware of the ways they are experiencing an intimate, affective encounter with God.

To summarize, this section explains the significance the reorientation of the heart plays in Ignatius’ vision for the Christian journey. The reorientation of the heart requires that people cultivate an awareness of their affective experiences with God. The next section looks specifically at how Ignatian prayer facilitates an experiential encounter with God.

**Ignatian Prayer and the Transformation of the Heart**

To facilitate an encounter with God that enables the transformation of the heart, Ignatius proposes three main forms of prayer in his *Spiritual Exercises*: reflective meditation, imaginative contemplation, and the prayer of examen. Jesuit writer Kevin O’Brien describes reflective meditation as follows: “In meditation, we use our intellect to wrestle with basic principles that guide our life. Reading Scripture, we pray over words, images, and ideas . . . Such insights into who God is and who we are before God allow our hearts to be moved.”⁰²¹ Ignatian meditation consists of a slow prayerful reflection on the scriptures that invites people to consider how they respond personally to the message.

Ignatian meditation involves four main movements. First, Ignatius suggests that a person begin with a time of preparation. Ignatius writes, “Before entering into the time

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for prayer we spend time relaxing, either by sitting or walking. It is good to use this time to recall what we are about to do.” Second, after this time of centering, Ignatius advises a person to ask for a particular grace. Ignatius uses the term grace to mean a specific answer to prayer rather than a more general undeserved gift of favor. For example, if a person is meditating on the Ten Commandments, they might ask God to give them the grace to see where they need to amend their ways. Third, the scripture is read and meditated on. In meditation a person is invited to explore how the words, images, or themes of the text intersect with their lives and experiences. For example, if someone is contemplating one of the Ten Commandments they might reflect on whether they have broken the commandments and seek forgiveness if they have. Finally, the meditation time concludes by entering into a conversation with God about something in the text that seemed to speak to the person. Ignatius writes, “We spend time speaking intimately with God our Lord and saying whatever comes to our mind and from our heart in regard to the particular matter which we have considered in our prayer.”

The goal of meditation is not to acquire information but to encounter God. As Kevin O’Brien writes, “In the Exercises we pray with scripture we do not study it.” Study is important but it is not the focus of the Ignatian meditation. In Ignatian meditation people reflect on how the scriptures speak to them. Commenting on meditative approaches to scripture, Eugene Peterson writes, “Meditation is participation,

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22 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 185.

23 Ibid., 187.

24 O’Brien, Ignatian Adventure, 15.
we move from being critical outsiders to becoming appreciative insiders.”

The goal of scripture meditation is not to engage in critical evaluation of the biblical text, but to recognize the way the text speaks to a person’s life.

Ignatian scripture meditation provides balance to biblical study methods that focus exclusively on critical analysis. Historical theologian Jean Leclercq suggests a critical academic approach to scripture began to eclipse this meditative approach to the scriptures during the rise of scholasticism in the eleventh century. He argues the critical academic approach to scripture continues to be the dominant way people read scriptures today. During the scholastic movement the center of theological study moved from the monasteries to the university. Leclercq notes, “The scholastic lectio takes the direction of the quaestio and the disputatio. The reader puts questions to the text and then questions himself on the subject matter,” whereas the monastic lectio, “is oriented toward the meditatio and the oratio.” Scholastic theology is focused more on debating and questioning the text than encountering and praying with the text. In the ancient Christian monastic tradition, however, scripture study and prayer were deeply united. For example, Evagrius Ponticus, a Christian monk from the fourth century writes, “If you are a theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian.”

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27 Ibid., 72.

28 Ibid., 72.

century monk Abba Nestoros encourages people to “strive in every way to devote
yourself constantly to the sacred reading so that continuous meditation will seep into your
soul and as it were, will shape it to its image.”\(^\text{30}\) The Ignatian approach to meditative
reading draws on this ancient monastic approach to meditation. The ancient meditative
approach to scripture reading emphasizes spiritual growth not intellectual understanding.

Brian McClaren observes that contemporary evangelicals have been shaped by a
scholastic approach to scripture reading and argues for a return to a more meditative
approach. He writes:

> What if instead of reading the Bible, you let the Bible read you? . . . What would
> happen if we approached the text less aggressively but even more energetically and
> passionately? I wonder what would happen if we actually listened to the story and put
> ourselves under its spell . . . not using it to get all our questions about God answered
> but instead trusting God to use it to pose questions to us.\(^\text{31}\)

McClaren notices that evangelicals often approach the scriptures “aggressively” with the
purpose of “getting all our questions about God answered.” A purely intellectual
approach to scripture reading that focuses on defending a point of view can prevent
people from humbly letting the scripture speak to their experience. The Ignatian approach
to meditation provides a helpful corrective. Ignatian meditation allows the God to
challenge, inspire, encourage, and guide the reader.

The second form of Ignatian prayer that facilitates an encounter with God is
imaginative contemplation. The word contemplation is used in different ways within the
various Christian traditions. In the Ignatian tradition it is associated with imaginative
reflection on scripture. Ignatian scholar Timothy Gallagher writes, “Within Christian


\(^{31}\) Quoted in Gary Moon, *Apprenticeship to Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 142.
tradition, Ignatius’s use of contemplation differs from that of John of the Cross. For John, contemplation signifies infused, passive, mystical prayer. For Ignatius, the same word indicates active imaginative participation in a Gospel event.”

Gallagher distinguishes meditation from contemplation saying, “Meditation is reflective and contemplation is imaginative.” Kevin O’Brien makes a similar point saying, “In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius.” Ignatian contemplation follows the same steps as meditation except the body of the prayer time involves imagining oneself into the story. Ignatius invites people to imagine themselves into the story by employing their senses, noticing what they see, hear, smell or feel.

Imaginative contemplation facilitates the reorientation of the heart by helping people discover how they are feeling and reacting to what is being portrayed in the scriptures. Kevin O’Brien observes, “Contemplation often stirs the emotions and inspires deep, God-given desires.”

Theologian Brandon O’Brien describes the impact that imaginative reflection has on the heart writing:

Jesus talked about the kingdom of God in a way that aroused the imagination. We tend to think that if we simply believe the right things then we'll behave the right way. But Jesus knew better. He knew that touching the imagination means penetrating beyond the intellect and pricking the conscience. If reason changes our minds, the imagination changes our hearts. It helps us feel the truth, not just know it. We can

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33 Ibid.


35 Ibid.
know full well what we ought to do. But touching the imagination can inspire us with a vision of God's reality that will compel us to act.\textsuperscript{36} O’Brien explains that imaginative contemplation helps people encounter and respond to the scriptures at the level of the heart.

Timothy Gallagher provides an example of how imaginative contemplation helps one of his directees named Anne have a heartfelt encounter with God. Anne describes a profound experience she has imagining herself into the scene where Jesus invites the little children to come to him. She writes, “I saw myself as one of the children, hugged by Jesus. It was an amazing experience. I felt so loved, so at peace.”\textsuperscript{37} Imaginative contemplation facilitated a process by which Anne was able to experience what the story is communicating. She “felt so loved, so at peace.” Anne did not simply reflect on the love of Jesus at a rational level she experienced Jesus’ love for her personally.

Whether engaging in either Ignatian meditation or contemplation the goal is to savor the most significant moments with God in the story. Ignatius writes in the second annotation, “It is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul.”\textsuperscript{38} Ignatius encourages people to slow down and relish the experiences they are having. If something significant takes place during a time of meditation or contemplation, a person is encouraged to stay with the experience without


\textsuperscript{37}Gallagher, Meditation and Contemplation, chap. 3, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{38}Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 6.
feeling pressure to move on to the next verse or scripture passage, waiting for God to draw them into spiritual dialogue.

A third form of prayer that facilitates a transformative encounter with God is the prayer of examen. The examen is a daily prayer that helps a person notice the signs of God in the midst of everyday life, while also exposing the disordered affections that prevent them from connecting with God. David Fleming outlines the prayer of examen as follows:

The examen that Ignatius outlined in the Spiritual Exercises has five points: 1) be grateful for God's blessings; 2) ask the help of the Spirit; 3) review the day, looking for times when God has been present and times when you have left him out; 4) express sorrow for sin and ask for God's forgiving love; 5) pray for the grace to be more totally available to God who loves you so totally.39

This prayer is a practical tool for helping a person cultivate an awareness of the presence of God in daily life. Commenting on his experience of the prayer of examen, James Martin writes, “The examen helps you to ‘realize’ the presence of God. For me, it transcends any proofs for the existence of God by asking you to notice where God already exists in your life, where your yesterdays were beautiful. With that awareness you will begin to notice God’s presence more and more in your day.”40 The prayer of examen helps people get in touch with their experience of God in their everyday life.

Ignatius invites people to become more aware of their affective responses to God both in scripture and in their everyday life. Reflective meditation, imaginative contemplation, and the prayer of examen are practical means by which people can


encounter God at an experiential level. These forms of prayer move people beyond intellectual insights towards a transformative encounter with God, which engages people at the level of the heart and motivates their response of love for God and neighbor.

**Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that the Ignatian *Exercises* facilitates the transformation of the heart. While the contemporary Protestant church tends to utilize discipleship models that focus on changing the way people think, the New Testament emphasizes the importance of reorienting the heart. Jesus does not simply call disciples to profess accurate views about God but to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength and love their neighbor as themselves. Spiritual formation is not simply about changing a person’s mind but changing what the heart desires and loves. Ignatius shares this New Testament perspective. The *Exercises* facilitates the reorientation of the hearts desires by emphasizing the role that affective experience plays in a person’s relationship with God. Through reflective meditation, imaginative contemplation, and the prayer of examen, people not only learn about God but encounter God in the scriptures and in their own experiences. Through a heightened awareness of their experiential encounter with God, people’s hearts are transformed.

This concludes the theological section of the project. The next section seeks to put this theology into practice. Chapter six outlines the plans and goals of a spiritual formation experience that introduces people the Ignatian *Exercises*. Chapter seven evaluates and reports on the outcomes of this spiritual formation initiative.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER SIX
ENCOUNTER: PLANS AND GOALS

The previous two chapters developed a theological vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation in the local church. Chapter four articulated that the church is a gathering of people who have two main callings—participating in a transformative love relationship with God and participating in God’s mission in the world. The Ignatian Exercises have the potential to support the church in living out both of these callings. The Exercises support the first order calling of the church by providing an intensive retreat that allows for a transformative encounter with the love of God. Dallas Willard suggests this type of focused and intensive time of spiritual formation mirror’s Jesus approach to discipleship, and is something the contemporary church currently lacks.¹ The Exercises also support missional engagement by motivating people to love others as they abide in the love of God, freeing people from unhealthy attachments so that they are ready to sacrificially serve others, helping people integrate faith into everyday life through reflective prayer, and inviting people to clarify and discern how God is calling them to serve. These aspects of the Exercises have the potential to inspire and direct effective outreach.

Chapter five argued that Ignatius provides a holistic approach to spiritual formation that transforms the human heart. The Scriptures emphasize that the heart, not the mind, is the center of the human person; thus, spiritual formation involves not only the reorientation of thinking but also the reorientation of the heart’s desires. Ignatius shares this biblical perspective by seeking to facilitate the reorientation of desire. He accomplishes this by encouraging people to move beyond theological insights into an experiential encounter with God, through reflective meditation, imaginative contemplation, and the prayer of examen. The desired outcome of the Exercises is not just intellectual knowledge of God, but a transformative encounter with God. The Exercises, Ignatius writes, are “for increasing openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, for helping to bring to light the darkness of sinfulness and sinful tendencies within ourselves, and for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.”

This chapter seeks to put this theology into practice. A ministry plan is developed to help the people of Longview Community Church experience the Spiritual Exercises. This chapter outlines the content and goals of this new ministry initiative.

**Content**

The ministry initiative proposed in this project is titled, Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. This retreat introduces the people of Longview Community Church to the Ignatian Exercises. The original Exercises were meant to take

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place over a thirty-day intensive retreat; however, Ignatius recognized that many people would be unable to get away for thirty days. Therefore, in the nineteenth annotation of the Exercises, he suggests adapting a retreat into everyday life. Ignatius writes, “We may be retreatants of suitable talent and proper disposition whom the director determines to help through the full Exercises, but carried on in the face of normal occupations and living conditions for the extent of the whole retreat. Truly it is a retreat in everyday life.”

Encounter develops a condensed version of the nineteenth annotation of the Exercises; inviting people to practice Ignatian prayer in the midst of daily life. There are four components to the Encounter retreat—an orientation day, daily Ignatian prayer practices, individual spiritual direction, and contemplative sharing groups. This section provides an overview of these four aspects of the retreat.

Orientation Day

The Encounter program begins with an orientation day. The purpose of the orientation day is to allow group members to develop relationships with other participants, cast a vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation, educate participants on the practice of Ignatian meditation and contemplation, contextualize Ignatian spirituality to a Protestant context, and create space for participants to practice Ignatian prayer.

To facilitate group connections and to introduce Ignatius’ emphasis on finding God in all things, the orientation retreat begins with a group exercise called the “Altar

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3 Ibid., 19.
Exercise.” Participants are asked in advance to bring an item that represents a way they have encountered God in their life over the past year. Group members introduce themselves, share briefly about the item they brought, and place it in the center of the room on an altar.

Following this group exercise, participants are lead through an introductory teaching session, which provides an overarching vision for an Ignatian approach to spiritual formation. This session summarizes the theology from chapter five of this project. Points covered include a biblical view of the person, the role of the heart and spiritual experience in spiritual formation, and an overview of the desired outcomes of the Ignatian Exercises.

The next teaching session introduces people to the purpose and process of Ignatian meditation. Participants learn the steps of Ignatian meditation, which include, centering the heart, seeking the grace desired in prayer, savoring the text through slow reflective reading, responding to God in prayer, and journaling about their experience. This session emphasizes how Ignatian meditation is consistent with Protestant spirituality because of its emphasis on biblical reflection. Following the teaching session, participants spend forty-five minutes practicing Ignatian meditation with Psalm 8. This Psalm is chosen because it reflects the content of Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation, which forms the starting point for Ignatius’ Exercises. The Exercises are built on the foundation that people are aware of God as loving creator.

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4 This exercise is based on an exercise my D.Min cohort used to begin each of our retreat sessions together.

5 David Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 189.
The third session of the orientation day introduces people to Ignatian imaginative contemplation. The steps are similar to Ignatian meditation but the body of the prayer invites people to use their imagination to enter the scripture.\textsuperscript{7} In order to contextualize this practice to a Protestant context, participants are made aware of how the original writers of the gospels use the present tense in order to draw readers into the story personally.\textsuperscript{8} Imaginative contemplation is also contextualized to a Protestant audience by clarifying that the imaginative process is anchored within the boundaries of scripture. Timothy Gallagher writes, “The Scripture text itself guides the work of our imagination and so ensures the essential authenticity of such imaginative prayer.”\textsuperscript{9} Imaginative contemplation is not an invitation to make things up out of nothing; instead it invites people to imagine what taking place in the scriptures and reflect on how they would respond if they were at the scene.

Once the practice of imaginative contemplation is explained, participants will be given a second forty-five minute personal prayer session, where they will engage in imaginative contemplation on the story of Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10. This text is chosen for the orientation because it captures the image of Jesus desiring to come and abide with people in their homes. This theme is referenced at the end of the orientation day as people are commissioned to begin their daily prayer practices at home throughout the summer.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{7} Timothy Gallagher, \textit{Meditation and Contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Prayer with the Scripture}, (New York: Crossroad, 2008), intro, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{8} Quoted in James Wakefield, \textit{Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), chap. 2, Kindle.

\textsuperscript{9} Gallagher, \textit{Meditation and Contemplation}, chap. 3, Kindle.
The orientation concludes with instructions about the next steps of the Encounter retreat. Participants are given prayer guides for their retreat in daily life, sign up for their first spiritual direction session, and receive the schedule for the group sessions. The orientation day ends with a final meditation on Luke 19:1-10, a prayer of blessing for participants, and a benediction.

Individual Spiritual Practices

The Encounter retreat invites participants to commit to approximately forty-five minutes of daily prayer six days a week for a nine-week period. Encounter introduces Ignatian prayer, prepares people for the Exercises, and leads people through the first of four movements of the Exercises. This introductory retreat allows for people to get acquainted with new forms of prayer without the expectation of embarking on an eight to ten month process, which is needed to accomplish the entire nineteenth annotation of the Exercises. It also sets the stage for continuing with the rest of the Exercises if people so desire.

The first three weeks of the retreat focus on helping people develop confidence in the love and goodness of God. Ignatius suggests people need to establish this foundation before they embark on the rest of the Exercises. In his opening instructions to retreat directors, Ignatius writes, “The most important qualities in the person who enters into these exercises are openness, generosity, and courage. As retreatants, our one hope and desire is that God will place us with his Son so that in all ways we seek only to respond to
that love which first created us and now wraps us round with total care and concern."10 Ignatius encourages directors of the retreat to begin by helping people develop openness to God as they discover the total care and concern that Jesus has for them. Developing a foundation in God’s love is also reflected in Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation, which is the first meditation of the opening week of the Exercises. Here, Ignatius writes, “God loves us, creates us, and wants to share his life with us forever.”11 Until this foundational awareness of God’s love is developed, people are not ready to move on to the rest of the Exercises. When Ignatius led Pierre Farve through the Exercises, he spent four years seeking to establish this foundation. William Barry comments, “Pierre was full of scruples, terrified of God’s wrath. He seems to have had an image of God as a terrifying snoop seeking to catch him out. With such an image of God he could not enter the Spiritual Exercises with trust and hope and great desires for closeness to God.”12 Ignatius spends time helping Farve work through his negative images of God and helping him rebuild confidence in God’s love and goodness for him.

Week one focuses on the theme of God’s loving care. Participants begin each prayer session by asking God to give them a deep confidence and trust in his goodness and love for them.13 The texts selected for daily prayer focus on the theme of God’s

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10 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 9.
11 Ibid., 27.
love. These include the story of Jesus seeking the lost sheep, in Luke 15:1-17; Jesus’ encouragement not to worry because he cares about the needs of his people, in Luke 12:22-31; the psalmists celebration of God’s mercy, in Psalm 103; Paul’s prayer that people will grasp the full dimensions of God’s love, in Ephesians 3:14-21; and the psalmist’s meditation on Jesus as a loving shepherd, in Psalm 23. On the fifth day of week one, participants are also invited to explore eight to ten significant events in their life and reflect on the ways God was present in each event. The sixth day of each week encourages people to review the week and repeat an exercise that evoked the strongest emotional reaction.

Week two focuses on the intimacy of God. The daily grace people pray for is the same as week one: “God grant me a deep confidence and trust in your goodness and love for me.” The texts selected for this week encourage people to consider God’s love at a personal and intimate level. As people meditate on the daily passages, they are encouraged to imaging God is saying the words directly to them. The texts include Hosea 11:1-8, where God speaks of the depth of his love for Israel; Isaiah 43:1-7, where God says that people are precious in his eyes; Luke 11:1-13, where Jesus tells people that his love is greater than that of an earthly father; Romans 8:26-29, which emphasizes that nothing can separate us from God’s love; and Psalm 42, which invites people to people to look for the ways God’s love is present in hardship.

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14 The suggested scripture passages and weekly themes are a synthesis of Ignatius’ original Exercises; numerous contemporary versions of the Exercises, including James Wakefield’s, Sacred Listening, Joseph Veltri’s, Orientations, Kevin O’Brien’s, The Ignatian Adventure, Timothy Muldon’s, The Ignatian Workout, Jacqueline Bergan and Marie Shwan’s Love: A Guide to Prayer, and Forgiveness: A Guide to Prayer, and passages that I have personal found relevant to the weekly themes.

15 This exercise is drawn from James Wakefield, Sacred Listening, sec. 2, unit 2, Kindle.
Week three focuses on God as loving creator. Participants are invited to marvel at God’s love expressed in his creative power and cultivate a spirit of gratitude for the gift of God’s creation. Each day participants pray for the grace, “God grant me wonder and gratitude for how you created me and the world.” The texts of the week focus on God’s as a loving creator and include Psalm 8, Psalm 139, Genesis 1:24-2:3, Jeremiah 18:1-6 and Psalm 104. On the fifth day of week three participants are encouraged meditate on Psalm 104 while out in nature. After meditating on the psalm they are invited to meditate on the beauty of creation.

Week four introduces the theme of spiritual freedom. Having meditated on the goodness of creation, participants now reflect on the way their relationship to the created order can become disordered. This week participants are invited to seek spiritual freedom from any disordered affections that get in the way of following Christ. The grace of the week is, “God give me grace to grow in interior freedom and become more aware of the things that get in the way of loving you, others, or myself.” The first day of the week participants meditate on Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation. The next four days participants meditate on texts that focus on spiritual freedom including Psalm 63, Philippians 4:7-11, Matthew 6:19-24, and John 3:22-30.

The next four weeks lead people through the first movement of the original Exercises. These weeks explore the disordered affections that get in the way of following God. Participants seek a deeper awareness of their sin, cultivate an awareness of God’s continued mercy and forgiveness, and pursue repentance. This section of the retreat is

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built on the foundation that God loves people. Participants are taught at the outset of week four to distinguish between the true conviction of the Holy Spirit, which is marked by hope and freedom, and the condemnation of the evil one which leads to regret and death (2 Cor 7:10). If participants find themselves struggling with feelings of condemnation and guilt, they are encouraged to center on Romans 8:1, which says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Participants are invited to repeat some of the exercises from the first two weeks if they feel they need to spend more time cultivating a trust in God’s love and goodness.

Week five focuses on the reality of sin. The grace for the week is, “God grant me an awareness of and confusion over my sin, along with an amazement of your continuing love.” Participants spend the first two days looking at the parable of the prodigal son, in Luke 15:11-32. They are invited to imagine themselves into the story and consider whom they relate to and how they respond to the father. Day three looks at the story of the fall, in Genesis 3:1-13; day four reflects on Paul’s struggle with sin, in Romans 7:14-25; and day five is based on Ezekiel 33:11, where God states his confusion over people’s rebellion and his desire that they turn and live. On day five, participants are encouraged to reflect on why they sin.

Week six focuses on the consequences of sin. The grace of the week is, “God grant me a growing awareness of the consequences of my sin and a gratitude for your

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18 This grace is based on James Wakefield’s insight in Sacred Listening, sec 2, unit 2, Kindle. Wakefield adopts the language of “confusion” as opposed to Ignatius’ original instruction to pray for “shame” over one’s sins. I prefer Wakefield’s word choice. The word shame does not capture the true nature of the conviction of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (2 Cor 7:10), and can potentially created an unhealthy image of God.
desire to free me.” The point of this week is for people to cultivate a deeper desire for freedom from attachments as they discover the negative consequences of sin in their life. The texts for the week include Isaiah’s lament about the social consequences of sin, in Isaiah 58:6-12; the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in Luke 16:19-31; the writer of Hebrews statement about the way sin entangles people, in Hebrews 12:1; and Jesus’ statement that the thief comes to destroy while he has come to give life to the full, in John 10:1-10.

Week seven encourages people to discover the specific sins they are struggling with in their life. The grace of the week is, “Grant me an awareness of my sin along with a gratitude for the grace of Jesus.” The texts for this week include the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20:1-17; Jesus’ reflection on the commandments, in Matthew 5:17-48; Jesus’s emphasis on understanding the hidden disordered tendencies in the human heart, in Mark 7:14-23; the contrast between the Pharisee and the tax collector, in Luke 18:9-14; and David’s prayer in Psalm 139:23-24, where he asks God to search him and expose his sin so he might follow God more fully.

Week eight focuses on the mercy and forgiveness of God. Having spent time exploring the dynamic of sin and seeking God’s liberating grace, participants now spend time in gratitude for God’s mercy and love. The grace of the week is, “God, give me a deep gratitude for your eagerness to forgive and set me free.” The week begins with an invitation for participants to imagine that they are at the scene of the crucifixion and contemplate Jesus words, “Father forgive them, they know not what they do,” in Luke 23:26-34. The rest of the week draws on texts that celebrate the mercy and love of God including Luke 7:36-50, Romans 5:1-8, John 21:1-19, and Ephesians 1:3-10.
The final week of the Encounter retreat focuses on God’s calling and people’s response. Having worked through the issues of sin in their life, participants are now encouraged to move forward in freedom, pursuing the call that Christ has for their life. The grace for the week is, “Give me an awareness of the many ways you call me and the courage to respond.” The texts for this week include God’s call on Samuel’s life, in 1 Samuel 3; Jesus invitation for the disciples to follow him, in Luke 5:1-11; Jesus’ question, “What are you looking for?” in John 1:35-39; and Jesus’ commission to his disciples, in John 20:19-23. During this week, participants also spend time meditating on Ignatius’ parable ‘The Call of the King,’ where people picture Jesus calling them to join him on a mission in the world. On the last day of week nine participants are invited to write a letter God responding to the question, “God, the life I want most for myself is . . .”

Three other individual practices are encouraged during the duration of the nine-week Encounter retreat. First, as participants work through the daily prayer practices, they are encouraged to keep a prayer journal. Ignatius suggests that a person spend about fifteen minutes after each prayer time reviewing their experiences and noting how they are encountering God. Ignatius writes:

After a formal prayer period is finished I should review what happened during the past hour – not so much what ideas did I have, but more the movements of consolation, desolation, fear, anxiety, boredom, and so on. . . I thank God for the favors received and ask pardon for my own negligence’s of the prayer time.20


20 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 69.
Ignatius emphasizes that the purpose of the review is not to recount everything that took place during prayer, or focus on insights that were gained during prayer, but to notice the interior movements and feelings that were aroused during prayer. Encounter participants are encouraged to write down these insights in a journal. They are given a handout developed by Kevin O’Brien, which provides some helpful questions to direct the journaling process. These questions include:

- What were the significant interior movements (that is, feelings, reactions, intuitions, desires, emotions, thoughts, or insights)? What was the prevailing mood of my prayer: peace, agitation, excitement, boredom, confusion, calm? Was my prayer more about the head or the heart, or about both? What word, phrase, image, or memory meant most to me during prayer? Is there some unfinished business that I think God is calling me to return to during another time of prayer? Is there something happening in my life that is becoming part of my prayer? Do I feel moved to do something concrete in my life? Am I making the necessary preparations for my prayer? Is there anything I am doing or not doing that is getting in the way of my listening to God?  

Participants do not need to work through all of these questions systematically. These questions are merely prompts to guide their reflection. The overall purpose of the prayer journal is to notice what is being experienced during prayer. Participants do not hand in their journals, but the journals provide material they can bring to spiritual direction and contemplative sharing sessions. Kevin O’Brien also points out that the journal often “becomes a rich spiritual treasure to which you can return months or even years after the retreat.”

Second, the prayer of examen is introduced during the fourth week of the retreat, after people have had a chance to become familiar with Ignatian meditation and

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22 Ibid., 27.
contemplation. Participants are encouraged to incorporate the prayer of examen in the evenings three times a week. There are number of different versions of the prayer of examen. The version used for the Encounter retreat is the awareness examen adapted by Kevin O’Brien.23 The steps of the awareness examen include asking for God’s help to see signs of his presence, giving thanks for the gifts of the day, reflecting on the significant feelings that surface as the day is reviewed, rejoicing over the grace filled experiences and seeking forgiveness for the moments when people were out of step with God, and looking ahead to the next day. I favor this version of the examen because it helps people know what to focus on during the prayer time. Instead of reviewing everything, which can be overwhelming and time consuming, the awareness examen encourages people to zero in on the strongest feelings that surface during the day. The strong feelings are often clues to significant issues, both positive and negative, that are at work in a person’s life.

The third individual practice added to the daily scripture meditations is writing a spiritual autobiography. This practice is not included in Ignatius’ original Exercises, though he does invite people to write out a general confession that reviews their history of sin. Also, Ignatius wrote his own autobiography, so he models this practice. Many contemporary versions of the Exercises encourage an extensive reflection on one’s personal spiritual history. James Wakefield’s Sacred Listening leads people through a number of autobiographical reflections on life during the daily prayer practices.24 Other contemporary versions of the Exercises, like Tim Muldoon’s The Ignatian Workout,

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23 Ibid., 75.

24 Wakefield, Sacred Listening, sec 2, unit 2-4, Kindle.
encourage writing an autobiography as a separate practice. Encouter participants are encouraged to write their spiritual autobiography as a separate prayer practice. The reason for doing this separately is so that writing does not encroach on the practices of scripture meditation and contemplation. Effective meditation and contemplation require people to be centered and focused, so adding additional assignments to the prayer time can detract from effective meditation.

The spiritual autobiography assignment in the Encounter retreat is based on Jesuit writer Anthony De Mello’s practice called “A Testament.” De Mello encourages people to imagine they are about to die and have time to write out a final testament documenting significant aspects of their life. De Mello suggests a number of points to prayerfully reflect and write about including a person’s deep desires, meaningful experiences, core ideas and beliefs about life and God, outgrown beliefs, lessons learned from life, formative experiences of suffering, key influences, formative scripture passages that have guided life, regrets, achievements, people that are dear to the heart, and unfulfilled desires. It is recommended that people set aside whole day to work on this exercise.

Individual Spiritual Direction Sessions

Ignatius did not intend the Spiritual Exercises to be undertaken as a solo affair. In fact, the text of the Spiritual Exercises is written for retreat directors rather than participants. Ignatius recognizes that this type of retreat is best done in the context of a

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spiritual direction relationship. Therefore, participants are invited to reflect on their experience with their daily practices in the context of spiritual direction.

Jesuit spiritual directors William Barry and William Connolly define spiritual direction as:

Help given by one believer to another that enables the latter to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on the religious dimension of experience.27

Spiritual direction is not primarily about teaching or discussing ideas. Spiritual directors listen to a person’s spiritual experience, highlight significant things that they hear from a directee, and provide guiding questions for further reflection. Ignatius notes that the purpose of the director is not to do the work for the person. He says to directors, “He who is giving the Exercises should . . . leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its creator.”28 He reminds the spiritual director that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate director. Spiritual directors are simply there to help people to clarify what they are experiencing in prayer and reflect on the implications of these experiences.

There are multiple purposes for incorporating spiritual direction into the retreat. First, it enables a person to gain external perspective and avoid the limitations of their own biases. Tim Muldoon writes, “The role of the spiritual director is to help a person see through his or her biases in order to more clearly know the will of God. He or she does not lecture or teach but, rather, helps the person see more clearly the movements of God


28 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 14.
in prayer.”

Spiritual direction can bring clarity to people regarding what they are experiencing and hearing from God during prayer. Second, the spiritual director can help adapt the exercises to the needs of the individual. A director might suggest, for example, that a person stay with an important prayer theme instead of forging ahead to the next assignment. Kevin O’Brien writes, “The goal is drawing closer to God, not mechanically running through all of the exercises in order or in unison with others. In other words, the end of the Exercises is a Person, not a performance.”

A director can help discern the proper pace at which to go through the exercises, instead of mechanically going through the daily prayer assignments. Third, individual spiritual direction provides the opportunity for accountability and support if the person runs into challenges and discouragement during the process.

Participants in the Encounter retreat are encouraged to participate in at least two spiritual direction sessions. The first spiritual direction session is scheduled two weeks into the retreat and will focus on clarifying questions about the process and listening to the participant’s experiences in prayer. The second session takes place two thirds of the way through the retreat. Here participants can reflect on the challenges they are facing in their pursuit of spiritual freedom or reflect back on the key moments of the retreat. Over the course of my Doctor of Ministry program I was trained as a spiritual director; enabling me to act as spiritual director for the Encounter participants.

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Group Sessions

The last component of the Encounter retreat is contemplative sharing groups. The addition of a group component to Encounter is supported by the New Testament emphasis on the importance of spiritual community. In John 17:12, for example, Jesus prays for his disciples to experience oneness just as he and the father are one. Jesus desires that his disciples face life and ministry together in community. The writer of Hebrews suggests that spiritual community provides encouragement, accountability, and support in the face of the challenges and temptations that people encounter on the spiritual walk. Hebrews 3:12 states, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily.” The antidote to turning away from God is the regular encouragement of the community of faith. Similarly, the apostle Paul regularly urges the early church to support and encourage one another. He envisions the church as a body made up of many parts that work together (1 Cor 12). The New Testament uses the Greek word *koinonia* to describe the type of fellowship and community Christians share. Theologian Jerome Theisen defines this word as "an intimate bond of sharing that is established by participation in a shared reality."31 The intent of the contemplative sharing groups is to help people develop deep bonds as they share this spiritual journey together.

Marie Schwan and Jacqueline Bergan explain the distinction between a contemplative sharing group and other types of groups, writing:

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A faith-sharing group . . . is not a discussion group, sensitivity session, or social gathering. Members do not come together to share and receive intellectual or theological insights. Nor is the purpose of faith sharing the accomplishment of some predetermined task. Instead, the purpose is to listen and to be open to God as he continues to reveal himself in the church community represented in the small group that comes together in his name.32

The sharing groups for the Encounter retreat follow a format for group spiritual direction outlined by spiritual director Rose Mary Dougherty. 33 Groups begin with silent prayer and then each member has a chance to share about their experience with the *Exercises.* After a person shares, the group maintains silence for two to three minutes. Following the silence people can respond to the person who has shared. This process repeats until everyone has a chance to share. The group ends in an extended time of prayer for one another.

The success of these groups requires the proper training of leaders. A month prior to Encounter, leaders participate in a training session on how to facilitate a contemplative training group. Training involves an overview of the goals and process of a contemplative training group. Leaders also engage in practice sessions together to learn about the dynamics of contemplative sharing in a group setting. Leaders are also participants in the groups they lead, taking a turn sharing about their prayer experiences. Their role is to pray for the group prior to the session, keep time, make sure people have space to share, keep the group on track if it diverts from its intended purpose, and model contemplative listening.


33 Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction,* chap. 4, Kindle.
Before the first group session, each member receives instruction as to what is expected of them as both a sharer and responder. Spiritual director Rose Dougherty suggests that group participants make three commitments. She writes, “Three conditions are essential to the life of the group. Members must agree to commit themselves to 1) an honest relationship with God; 2) wholehearted participation in the group process through prayerful listening and response; and 3) opening their spiritual journeys to the consideration of others.”

As Dougherty suggests, the purpose in sharing is not to dwell on intellectual insights but to honestly share about one’s relationship with God at an experiential level. Dougherty argues the success of these groups requires members to be “comfortable or at least willing to move beyond the discussion of ideas about God and spiritual matters to the sharing of what actually goes on between themselves and God.”

Regarding the participants’ role as a listener, James Wakefield writes:

The ministry of listening encouraged by these Exercises is very specific. We are not asked to teach anything or to be responsible for anyone else. We are asked to walk on a spiritual path with other disciples, to offer them encouragement, to hold them accountable to continue praying, and if asked, to provide a reflection or second opinion that will help them appreciate their experience of the love of God. We are called as companions.

The main role of the listener is to notice how God is working in another person, offer a question that might lead to deeper reflection, encourage, and perhaps share a second opinion. Wakefield calls listeners to three main commitments. First, listeners seek to

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., chap. 5, Kindle.

36 Wakefield, Sacred Listening, sec. 1, chap. 4, Kindle.

37 Ibid.
hear people accurately. Second, listeners need be aware of their tendency to control, influence, or force a person to move at a different pace than God is calling them. Third, Wakefield reminds listeners that confidentiality is essential for a safe sharing environment.

The ability to listen well is supported by the practice of silence during the sharing session. Rose Dougherty states, “Silence is a time for making space for God, for allowing God to cut through the limits of our biases and our habitual ways of responding so that we can respond to the person from a place of prayer.” After each person shares, two to three minutes of silence is held. This time allows people to slow down, reflect on what they have heard, and prayerfully consider how God is calling them to respond.

Content Summary

There are four components to the Encounter retreat—an orientation day, individual spiritual practices, individual spiritual direction, and contemplative sharing groups. The orientation retreat casts a vision for the Ignatian approach to spiritual formation, teaches Ignatian meditation and contemplation, and helps group members get acquainted with one another. The individual spiritual practices span a nine-week period and invite people to engage in meditation and contemplation six days a week, keep a prayer journal, pray the prayer of examen, and write a spiritual autobiography. Individual spiritual direction provides an opportunity for people to reflect on their experience in prayer and receive accountability, support, and guidance throughout the retreat. Contemplative sharing groups provide a second avenue for reflection and support as

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38 Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, chap. 4, Kindle.
people learn to share about their experiences and listen to one another. Having outlined the content of the Encounter, I now look at the goals Encounter seeks to accomplish.

**Goals**

The overall goal of this ministry initiative is to help the people encounter and respond to the love of God. These goals of encountering God and responding to God are further expanded into five desired outcomes, which include an increased ability to experience God in scripture, awareness of God in everyday life, openness to God, freedom from disordered affections, and desire to love and serve God. This section describes each of these desired outcomes. However, before looking at each outcome, it is important to highlight the word “increase.” It is not expected that participants will fully arrive at these goals. The hope is that they experience some positive movement in these areas. Spiritual formation is a life-long process, so it is not realistic to expect a nine-week retreat to fully develop these dynamics in a persons’ life.

The first desired outcome of this ministry initiative is to increase participants’ capacity to encounter God in scripture. James Wakefield writes, “Ignatius invites us into the story of Jesus and calls us to be transformed by our participation in the story. With our imagination and reason, with our five bodily senses, and especially with our emotions, we become secondhand witnesses of the events of Scripture.”39 Kevin O’Brien makes a similar observation saying, “Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with

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God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ.”

As participants engage in Ignatian meditation and contemplation, the hope is that they will be drawn into a transformative encounter with God. People’s ability to encounter God is contingent on an increased awareness of their affective experience of God. Thus, the achievement of this goal is dependent on people cultivating a deeper capacity to notice how they are responding to God emotionally during prayer.

The second desired outcome is for participants to cultivate an increased awareness of God in everyday life. As Ignatius highlights in his Principle and Foundation, “All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily.”

People’s daily experiences can become a context where they encounter God. James Martin writes, “Ignatian spirituality considers everything an important element of your life. That includes religious services, sacred Scriptures, prayer, and charitable works, to be sure, but it also includes friends, family, work, relationships, sex, suffering, and joy, as well as nature, music, and pop culture.”

As people engage in the prayer of examen and work through their spiritual autobiography, the hope is that they can cultivate a deeper awareness of how God is at work in their life.

The third desired outcome of the retreat is to increase people’s openness to God. In the opening annotation of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius writes, “What we call

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40 O’Brien, Ignatian Adventure, 14.
41 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 5.
spiritual exercises are good for increasing openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{43} For many people, cultivating openness involves working through unhealthy images of God, doubts, and issues of distrust that they may have towards God. As noted above, these themes are addressed near the beginning of the spiritual formation retreat. Through meditating on the love and goodness of God, the hope is that people gain a renewed trust and confidence in God.

Openness toward God also requires an ability to let go of the things that get in the way of responding to God. Therefore, a fourth and concurrent goal of openness is freedom from disordered loves or attachments. In the first annotation Ignatius writes that a second purpose of the \textit{Exercises} is to rid the soul “of all the disordered tendencies.”\textsuperscript{44} In his final preliminary observation, Ignatius writes that his desire is for retreat participants to find, “true spiritual freedom.” He goes on to say, “We grow into this freedom by gradually bringing an order of values into our lives so that we find at the moment of choice or decision we are not swayed by any disordered love.”\textsuperscript{45} James Wakefield makes a similar point in his introduction to a contemporary version of the \textit{Exercises} saying, “Your goal in making these Exercises is to grow in responsive spiritual freedom. We seek freedom from our past, and we seek freedom from present constraints on our loving response to God.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Fleming, \textit{Draw Me into Your Friendship}, 5.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{46} Wakefield, \textit{Sacred Listening}, sec. 1, chap. 1, Kindle.
To work toward the desired outcome of spiritual freedom, participants in the spiritual formation retreat are invited to reflect on their attachments and disordered loves and bring them before God in prayer. A significant section in the nine-week retreat involves the practice of confession and a time of reflection on the major attachments that tend to hold people back from loving and serving God. The prayer of examen also provides a regular opportunity to notice attachments and bring them before God in confession.

Ignatius believes that spiritual freedom not only involves removing disordered affections but replacing these disordered affections with the love of God. Ignatius concludes his first annotation saying that the Exercises are meant “for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond more faithfully to the love of God.” Therefore, the fourth desired outcome of the retreat is to help people experience an increased desire to love and serve God. The hope is that the Encounter retreat might spark an increased motivation to live out the Great Commandment to whole-heartedly love God and love others.

This project has made mention of the Exercises’ emphasis on helping people discern God’s leading in their life. While discernment is a central goal of the Ignatian Exercises, it is not a concept that is fully developed in the Encounter retreat. Encounter mainly focuses on preparing people for the Exercises and leading them through the first movement of the Exercises. The theme of discernment becomes more prominent in the later parts of Ignatius’ Exercises, which are not included in the Encounter retreat. The last

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47 Fleming, Draw Me into Your Friendship, 5.
week of the Encounter retreat invites people to make some preliminary reflections on God’s calling, but the principles of discernment are not formally taught.

**Conclusion**

Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life seeks to introduce the people of Longview Community Church to the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. It consists of an orientation day, daily prayer practices, spiritual direction and contemplative sharing groups. This ministry initiative seeks to move people beyond an intellectual engagement with scripture to an experiential encounter with God. The goals of this retreat include an increased ability to have an experiential encounter with God in scripture, ability to encounter God in everyday life, openness to God, freedom from disordered affections, and desire to love and serve God. The next chapter describes the implementation of the Encounter retreat, outlines the evaluation tools used to assess its effectiveness, and reports the outcomes.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
ENCOUNTER: IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The previous chapter provided an overview of the content and goals of Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. During the summer of 2018, a group of fourteen people from Longview Community Church participated in this ministry initiative. This chapter provides an overview of the implementation process, assessment tools, outcomes, and program evaluation of the ministry initiative.

Implementation Process

This section provides an overview of the implementation of the Encounter retreat. It describes the formation of the group and the timeline of implementation. It also describes the resources, personnel, and training needed to facilitate the Encounter.

Six weeks leading up to the start of Encounter, the ministry initiative was advertised through announcements, emails, and a church newsletter article. The number of participants was intentionally capped at fifteen people so that I could provide spiritual direction for each member. The group was filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Participants were randomly divided into three contemplative sharing groups.
The Encounter retreat was implemented with the following timeline. The retreat started with an orientation day on June 23, 2018 at LCC’s interim pastor Mary Ross’s property at Mill Creek in Longview, Washington. This venue provided a helpful space for both group sessions and personal prayer sessions. During the orientation day, participants received their prayer guides with nine-weeks of daily practices. The daily practices were scheduled to run from June 25 to August 24, though people were free to work at a slower pace if needed. At the orientation day, participants also signed up for their first spiritual direction session, which took place during the first two weeks of the retreat. A second round of spiritual direction sessions took place in August.

Contemplative sharing groups took place on July 5, July 12, August 6, and August 16 in the chapel at Longview Community Church. A final celebration and sharing night took place on August 30 at my home.

The Encounter retreat required the support of a number of different volunteers and leaders. Patty Howland, administrative assistant at Longview Community Church, helped with publicity and assembly of the binders for Encounter participants. These binders included material for the orientation retreat, daily prayer assignments, additional resources on Ignatian prayer, and a section for journaling. Mary Ross hosted the orientation day and helped with set up and food preparation. Encounter also required three small group leaders to facilitate contemplative sharing groups. These leaders were also participants in the retreat. Group leaders participated in a training session on July 1, where they were introduced to the vision, goals, timeline, and process for the contemplative sharing sessions as described in chapter six. All participants received the
same training on how to participate in a contemplative sharing group during the first group session on July 5.

**Assessment Process**

The Encounter retreat was primarily evaluated through an anonymous self-assessment survey. The full survey is attached as Appendix A of this project. The survey consists of four parts. The first part of the survey begins with questions inviting people to reflect on the state of their spiritual life at the end of the retreat. The second part of the self-evaluation tool gives participants open-ended space to write reflections on the retreat. Participants are encouraged to review their journal and share the most important experiences from the retreat. The third part of the self-evaluation tool asks participants to evaluate their growth in the five goals of the retreat and provides space to write comments or examples under each area. The final part of the self-evaluation tool asks participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the different components of the Encounter retreat.

Along with the personal evaluation surveys, I also evaluated the Encounter retreat by taking notes after hearing about people’s experiences during individual spiritual direction sessions and contemplative sharing group sessions. I specifically looked for examples of people experiencing either growth or a lack of growth in the five desired outcomes of the retreat. Basic notes and key words were written down during the sessions and more detailed descriptions were written down directly following the session to ensure accuracy.

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1 See Appendix A on page 180.
All of the data compiled through personal evaluations and notes from spiritual direction and group sessions was kept confidential. Participants were invited to keep their surveys anonymous if they desired. They also signed an informed consent letter that allowed for the reporting of outcomes, and explained that any reporting would be kept confidential. In reporting outcomes, names or other details that compromise a person’s identity are withheld or changed.

**Outcomes**

The overall goal of this project is to help the people of Longview Community Church deepen their ability to encounter and respond to the love of God through an introductory experience of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. This overall goal was expanded into five desired outcomes as described above. This section presents the results of each desired outcome.

**Increased Capacity for an Experiential Encounter with God in Scripture**

Many Encounter participants observed an increase in their capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture. Eight out of twelve respondents in the survey said they experienced a significant increase in this area. In response to the question, “How are you experiencing God in prayer?” eight participants said God seemed very present to them at the end of the retreat.

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2 Of the fourteen participants in the Encounter retreat, twelve people completed the retreat and submitted evaluation forms.
A number of participants commented that their ability to encounter God in scripture was facilitated by the Ignatian approach to scripture meditation. One participant wrote, “For the first time in a while I find myself enjoying scripture. It used to be like driving a car – I was heading to a destination but not being present during the process.” By slowing down and spending time meditating on a shorter passage of scripture, this participant experienced an increased ability to enjoy and experience what the scriptures were saying. This participant described being captured by the beauty of Psalm 103. She wrote, “I have been savoring this scripture for three days now. I am going to let the hugeness of that soak in for a while . . . The majesty of God and his care for His creation (all creatures!) is so strong. I just realized that more than ever before.” Another participant commented, “Many of the bible studies I’ve been a part of have often felt rushed. They have tried to cover too much information.” The Ignatian approach to scripture meditation, by contrast has enabled this person to rediscover the joy of scripture.

Participants also reported that imaginative contemplation facilitated their ability to encounter the text personally. One participant commented, “Visualizing myself at the scene of scriptures and talking with God about them makes the experience real to me.” Another participant similarly observed, “Several times when reading a scripture and imagining myself as a person or persons in the scenario I would so emotionally identify with them and their encounter with Jesus that I was led to tears in an awareness of his presence at that moment. This happened several times and has become a significant faith building event.” One participant shared a specific example of how imaginative contemplation facilitated a powerful spiritual experience. This person wrote, “I had a
profound experience with Isaiah 43. When God said to Israel, ‘you are mine,’ I read that as if it was spoken to me and tears came. I felt like oil poured over my head and everything stood still. A feeling of peace came over me. It was almost beyond words, and I couldn’t even write much that day. I just savored the experience.” Another participant described a similar experience when she used her imagination to enter into Jeremiah 18, where God is likened to a potter who rebuilds the clay. During a spiritual direction session, this participant commented, “I imagined the feeling of clay being molded and it helped me realize that clay is forgiving. It can be reworked not discarded and in a similar way God can work out the mistakes in my life.”

Throughout the retreat participants grew in their ability to observe and reflect on the feelings they experienced in meditation and contemplation. By attending to their feelings, they gained a deeper awareness of how they were experiencing God in the scriptures. One participant commented, “I am experiencing God’s love personally for the first time. When reflecting on John 3:16 I personalized the text and realized that God loves ‘me’ not just ‘the world’ or ‘the group’ that I happen to be a part of. I realized that God actually likes me and wants to be with me.” This participant said this experience evoked “feelings of gratitude and joy, I feel a lump in my throat.” Reflecting on a meditation experience with Luke 15, one participant commented, “When I lose my way, God is actively searching for me and for ways to bring me back to closeness with him. I felt the comfort of that assurance in my prayers today.” By attending to their feelings participants not only gained theological insights from the scriptures, they experienced the spiritual realities being depicted in scripture.
Increased Awareness of God in Everyday Life

The second desired outcome was for participants to experience an increase in their awareness of God in their everyday lives. Seven participants indicated a significant increase in this area, four participants experienced somewhat of an increase, and one participant said they experienced no increase in this area. When asked, “How connected do you feel God is to your everyday life?” six participants said God feels very connected, three participants said God feels somewhat connected, and three participants did not answer.

A number of participants experienced an increased awareness of God in nature. One of the daily practices invited people to meditate on Psalm 104 while sitting out in nature. Reflecting on this prayer session, one participant commented, “On the night set aside for the longer reflection on Psalm 104, I opted to sit still and watch the entire sunset over the mountains as I prayed. As Venus crept sleepily above the horizon, it was stunning; I was overcome with wonder and thanksgiving and humility before our great Creator.” Another participant was overcome with awareness of God’s presence while visiting Mt St. Helens. She commented, “The power of God was so present. It was overwhelming and humbling to think that this God is also mindful of us.” There are numerous other examples of participants having spontaneous experiences of God’s presence in nature during prayer. One person commented about an experience he had while meditating in his backyard. He wrote:

“Hummingbirds were darting around while I was reflecting today. Dandelions were blooming where I was walking and praying and singing . . . . Wow! It sounds so cheesy and obvious, yet I am encountering these realizations and emotions on a deeper level than the past. They are for me to enjoy given and
created by my Father who loves me more than I love my kids. I can hardly imagine that.

Another participant commented, “There was one wonderful week during the retreat where we read Psalm 8 and 104. I focused on seeing God in his creation – everywhere – the birds and flowers were wonderful.” Another participant described an affective experience when meditating on creation, and noted “feelings of gratitude and joy . . . I am in awe before creation and full of wonder, I have goose bumps and my heart is pounding.”

A number of participants gained a deeper awareness of God in their history as they reflected back on their life while writing their spiritual autobiography. One participant commented, “I am seeing God in my history—how he has been with me in difficult times.” Another participant said, “It is powerful to trace God in my history. I see how God has been in my life, in my marriage, in hard situations, in the ways he protected me, and in the miracles he performed.” Another participant commented, “I am noticing the beauty of God’s provision in retrospect; I see God as I reflect back over my life.”

Many participants observed an increased ability to notice God in their current experiences. Halfway through the retreat participants were taught the awareness examen, and this helped people discover God in daily life. One participant wrote, “The prayer of examen has helped me see God in my daily encounters.” Another participant wrote, “The examen makes me more aware of God in my everyday conversations.” One participant articulated, “Maybe because I’m coming closer to a face to face encounter with the creator, but everyday in all parts of my life, in the people I unexpectedly met, the household activities – there is an aura of his presence.” Another participant said,
“Eternity and the present are very close – overlapping – it feels like the kingdom of God is here.”

Some participants spoke about how they experienced a deeper awareness of God’s provision in their life, which evoked feelings of gratitude. One participant observed, “I am much more aware of God throughout my daily life and remember his love and care for me in times of anxiety as well as happiness . . . as my daily life unfolds, I see evidence of His presence and feel tons of gratitude to God.” Another participant wrote, “I see more ‘seeds’ that he plants in my life. He shows me daily little gifts and his thoughts mingle with mine. This equals joy.”

Increased Openness to God

Participants in the Encounter retreat demonstrated evidence of increased openness toward God at the completion of the nine-week retreat. In response to the question, “On a scale of one to five, with one being very closed, and five being very open, how open or trusting do you feel to God’s leading in your life?” the group averaged a rating of 4.3 out of 5. Six participants indicated they experienced a significant increase in their openness toward God; five participants said their openness toward God increased somewhat, and one person did not answer.

Some participants experienced an increased openness toward God by working through some unhealthy images of God. One participant commented, “I realized that God actually likes me and wants to be with me.” Another participant wrote, “I discovered that I am a child that God delights in not simply someone that God wants to use as a worker.” During a meditation on Luke 11, in which Jesus says, “Which of your fathers, if your son
asks for a fish will give him a snake,” one participant noticed, “I didn’t even realize how much I sculpt my prayers based on some belief that God loves me in a distant way; that he’s looking for a setup to come in and teach me a lesson.” This was a turning point for this participant. She wrote, “My prayers have reflected increased trust over the course of the summer.”

Other participants experienced an increased openness toward God by discovering a renewed desire for prayer and meditation. One participant commented, “For the first time in a long time I feel like I really desire to connect with God in scripture.” Another participant observed, “I have a renewed desire to be in the Bible, patiently, slowly sipping on a passage and savoring its flavor.” By slowing down and meditating on scripture, many participants felt a deeper connection with God, which increased their appreciation for scripture reading and meditation. Reflecting back on meditation session on Psalm 103, one participant commented, “Wow! After the encounter time today I am entering a deeper gratitude and deeper personal connection with God.” This is echoed by another participant who observed, “Reading the scriptures and participating emotionally in the word . . . has created a deep desire to spend more time in the word and in prayer.”

For some participants, an increased openness toward God is expressed in their ability to be honest about their doubts and struggles. One participant observed an “increased openness in my prayer language.” This participant experienced a renewed freedom to pray things like, “Where are you? I need your help through this dark time in my life, reveal yourself to me.” For some participants, the ability to lament and name their confusion was an important step toward experiencing a deeper intimacy with God. Early on in the retreat, one participant described hitting a wall in their relationship with
God. After naming this during a contemplative sharing group and hearing other people share similar struggles, the wall began to come down. This participant had a breakthrough moment during one of the daily prayer sessions. She commented on this experience in a spiritual direction session saying, “A feeling of peace came over me that was almost beyond words.” Another participant illustrated the way lament facilitated an increased openness toward God when she wrote:

I meditated and prayed on the verse, “In those days, the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.” “I cannot explain what an odd comfort I found in that verse. I cried throughout the entire session, much of the frustration washed away in my tears. I’d hoped with desperation to hear God, feel God, and I hadn’t heard anything all summer long apart from a challenge to trust God to give me a fish and not a snake. But maybe this is just a season when the word of the Lord is rare, when few have visions. Or maybe it’s just me—how can I know? But I felt peace in that time with God.

Despite feeling discouraged about experiencing God’s silence, this participant demonstrated a freedom to be honest and to voice lament. Though God seemed silent, the participant remained open to seeking God. She wrote, “All I can do is continue to talk to him, like a heartsick girl would write to her soldier during the world wars, hoping and having confidence that he is alive and receiving them, but with no certainty in the form of a return letter, at least today. I’ll keep on writing.” Despite feeling God’s silence, this participant remained open to pursuing God.

Increased Freedom from Attachments

A number of participants indicated they experienced an increased freedom from attachments throughout the Encounter retreat. Six participants indicated they experienced a significant increase in this area and five participants say they experienced somewhat of
an increase. Only one participant said they experienced no increase. In response to the question, “What priority do you feel God has in comparison to other aspects of your life?” just one participant said God is a small priority and the rest said God is either a significant or top priority in their life at the completion of the retreat.

Participants experienced spiritual freedom in a number of different ways. Some participants experienced an increased freedom from their attachment to material things. One participant described experiencing an “amputation of appetites,” and a “desire to simplify their lifestyle.” While still in process, this participant noted, “In a sporadic way I am experiencing more freedom.” Another participant experienced a similar detachment from material things. She observed an “increased disinterest in T.V. and movies in general and an increased joy in just praying to Jesus. He has put his desires, his love, in my heart.”

Some participants experienced a deeper level of contentment with who they are in Christ, thereby demonstrating a freedom from the need to prove their worthiness to God, others, or self. One participant wrote, “I accept myself now, I can bring that self to God in prayer.” Another participant observed an increased ability to “be myself before God—to be fully honest, fully human, and fully flawed.”

Some indicated an increased freedom from anxiety. One participant noted, “I am feeling a release from my anxiety. For example, I find myself less worried about the effects of getting older.” Others experienced release from anxiety over their children. One participant commented, “As I have traced God’s faithfulness in my history I have encountered more peace about my kids.” Another participant made a similar observation when reflecting on their encounter with the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15. She
wrote, “When those that I love or when I lose my way, God is actively searching for me and for ways to bring me back to closeness with him. I felt the comfort of that assurance in my prayers today. He actively cares for the ones He and I love that I feel so much anxiety about.”

A significant section in the daily practices invited participants to discover the way God offers forgiveness and freedom from sin. While this was a difficult journey, many people experienced a renewed sense of grace and liberation in their lives. One participant commented, “Confronting sin has been difficult but not oppressive.” During a spiritual direction session this participant shared how the exploration of sin in the retreat facilitated a process of reconciliation with a family member. As a result they said, “I never felt more free and happy in my spiritual journey than I do right now.” Another participant described a breakthrough moment when they encountered God’s grace during a time of meditation on their sin. This person wrote:

After praying daily, “God please grant me an awareness of my sin along with a gratitude for the grace of Jesus” during week seven, and remembering many of my sins that I’d forgotten over the years; it was week nine that brought me deeper into my relationship with God. Praying the first day, “Give me a deep gratitude for your eagerness to forgive and set me free,” putting myself into the scene of the crucifixion – the pure sweet lamb of God enduring the world’s sins - I have cried before but not like this time. It was heart wrenching. Thank you Jesus for your beautiful, pure love.”

This touching reflection captures an experience of liberation and release resulting from a process of introspection and contemplation on the mercy of God.
Increased Desire to Love and Serve God

The Encounter retreat motivated many participants to respond to God through devotion and service. Six participants described a significant increase in their desire to love and serve God. Five participants said this desire increased somewhat. At the end of the retreat the majority of participants indicate that following God was becoming either a significant or top priority in their life.

For a number of participants, their encounter with God’s love and mercy became a source of motivation to love others. One participant wrote, “Being profoundly reminded of what it cost God the father in giving up his son to bring humankind back, I can’t help but love him more and want to be his person in this world to love people to him.” Another participant commented, “When I see how God holds us together in love I want to serve him.” This participant noticed a different type of motivation than she experienced in her conservative upbringing. In the past she often felt pressured to serve or engage in door-to-door evangelism out of guilt. At the end of the retreat she indicated a genuine desire to serve. This participant commented, “Even though I am old, I feel excited for what God has in store for me.” In a spiritual direction session, another participant commented about a profound experience she had when praying with Psalm 102. This participant was deeply moved by God’s mercy for those who are afflicted, which evoked a response of deep devotion toward God. In tears this participant said, “I just really want to love God.”

Other participants grew in their desire to serve as a result of a more intentional reflection about their encounters with others. One participant found herself “weeping for the sad conditions of people,” and, “hurting for our natural world.” Another participant
wrote, “I want to love God with all my heart, soul, and mind and understand what that means. I want to serve God, be his hands and feet. Meet needs in the community. My big word in life is kindness. I want to be kind always. To be aware of needs around me.”

Another participant observed, “There is joy in taking care of others and thinking of others before myself – contentment follows.”

One participant described a moving experience where she noticed God’s presence while visiting someone in a local memory care unit facility. She wrote:

I held her hand gently ran my fingers over the standing veins and age stained skin. Slowly and gently back and forth my hand met hers. She did not speak, she could not speak. Our eyes met, our eyes held. My clear, lucent eyes. Hers bright and yet dull. I looked deeper, I saw Jesus, Jesus looking at me and with the same profound wonder I believe she saw Jesus looking at her. Love passed between us and held for the moment.

Commenting on this experience, the participant wrote, “This is a story that I believe would not have happened had I not been in our study group.” The Ignatian emphasis on finding God in all things enabled this participant to discover God in a suffering friend. This encounter at the memory care unit demonstrates an increased compassion toward someone in need.

A few of the participants in the encounter retreat discovered a renewed sense of calling in their life. In a spiritual direction session, one participant said the retreat helped them discover a renewed motivation to serve a sick family member. Another participant discovered a new calling to volunteer at a local health care outreach ministry. Another participant experienced a deepened passion for the ministry of teaching the bible. Though he has taught bible studies for numerous years he observed, “I have never been more
excited and passionate about teaching as I am now.” He also noticed an increased fruitfulness in his teaching as a result of the Encounter experience.

Overall, there are numerous examples of growth and movement in the five desired outcomes of the retreat. As spiritual formation is a slow process, there was no expectation for people to fully arrive at these goals after a nine-week period. The hope was to simply see signs of increased movement in the ability to encounter and respond to God. The journey towards awareness of God, openness, spiritual freedom, and passionate service is a life-long journey. It is apparent that this retreat proved to be a fruitful step for many participants towards these desired outcomes in the spiritual life.

**Program Evaluation**

Participants also evaluated the different components of the retreat and provided feedback on what they found helpful and what could be improved. Participants rated the orientation day, daily practices, spiritual direction sessions, and contemplative sharing groups on a scale of one to five, with one being unhelpful and five being very helpful. Overall, participants rated the program as helpful and worthwhile to their spiritual lives.

The average rating for the orientation day was 4.5. A number of participants said it as a helpful way to start the retreat. It provided a necessary instruction that built a framework from which to operate from. Participants also commented that it was helpful to be away from the church in a setting where they could be out in nature and have some personal space for reflection. Other participants noted the orientation provided an opportunity to get to know others participating in the retreat.
Participants found most of the daily practices helpful. The average rating for their experience with scripture meditation was 4.3; imaginative contemplation, 4.25; journaling, 4.4; the prayer of examen, 4.1; and the spiritual autobiography, 4.6. The spiritual autobiography received the highest rating. Many people said this exercise was very enlightening. One participant wrote, “The spiritual autobiography allowed me to gain new insights into my life story as I relived it. I learned why I am who I am.” Another participant noted that this exercise “broke me, and took me to places I had never been before.” While answering the questions posed in the assignment was difficult, this participant rated the exercise as very helpful. The lowest rating of the daily practices was the prayer of examen. One participant commented that she needed more practice with this type of prayer. Others commented that they struggled to find space for evening prayer as well as morning prayer. Overall, participants appreciated the balance of structure and flexibility with the various daily practices. One participant commented that she appreciated the “prayer suggestions, tempered with a sense of individual freedom to engage with God.”

Participants appreciated having one on one spiritual direction sessions. These sessions were given an average rating of 4.6. Participants commented that the spiritual direction sessions helped them open up, enabled them to organize their thinking, created space for feelings to be expressed, provided helpful questions that allowed them to put words to their experience, and clarified what they were experiencing. One participant wrote, “This was my favorite component of the retreat. I felt listened to.” Another participant wrote, “I appreciated the kind, attentive, nonjudgmental atmosphere that assured me that my time in prayer and contemplation was uniquely my experience and
didn’t need to be like anyone else.” A few participants suggested that it would have been helpful if more spiritual direction sessions were offered.

The contemplative sharing groups received mixed reviews. This component received an average rating of 4.1. While five participants gave a rating of 5.0, five other participants gave it a rating of 3.0. Those who found the group helpful said it provided support, encouragement, spiritual connection, helpful insights, and validation for their struggles. One person commented, “I often hesitate to participate in events like this because I don’t feel spiritual enough; maybe I won’t measure up . . . The small group session helped to support and encourage that sense of validity for each person’s encounters with God. It created a sense of unity in the spirit.” Those who found the group less helpful said it sometimes felt contrived, it was hard to open up, or it was not a place where they felt free to be honest. One person commented:

When wrestling with deeper issues of faith I think I feel more comfortable being vulnerable with either complete strangers or with very trusted people. I found myself somewhat reluctant to share with people I casually recognized from church. This reluctance was validated when one member of our group was clearly uncomfortable with my struggles and felt I needed to be rescued rather than given permission to sit with my discomfort and let God challenge me with it.

One person suggested that it might have been helpful if there were more than four group sessions, so that people could have a chance to grow deeper in their relationships. Having the retreat take place in summer also created disruption to the groups, as people were not always able to make each session due to travelling.
Conclusion

Overall the Encounter retreat has proven to be effective and fruitful in helping people grow in their ability to encounter and respond to God. There is evidence to show that participants experienced growth in each of the five desired outcomes. Participants described significant increases in their capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture, awareness of God in daily life, openness toward God, freedom from disordered affections, and desire to serve God. Furthermore, participants rated all components of the Encounter retreat as helpful. All components averaged above four out of five on the helpfulness scale. The program could be improved by providing more spiritual direction sessions, as those seemed to be effective in helping people adapt the retreat to their personal experience. Having a smaller group participate in Encounter, or training more spiritual directors, would make this possible. The contemplative group sharing experience, while difficult and awkward for some, was a source of support and encouragement for others. The groups could potentially be more helpful by increasing the number of group sessions, providing more training in the contemplative group format, and hosting the retreat during the school year when people are not travelling as much. Lastly, more instruction and practice might have helped people engage with the prayer of examen more effectively. This concludes the evaluation of the Encounter retreat. The next section provides an overall conclusion to this project as a whole.
PROJECT CONCLUSION

It is fitting for a project on Ignatian prayer to end with a process of reflection. This conclusion functions as a sort of examen exercise. It begins by reflecting back on the project; noticing the insights gained, outcomes achieved, and lessons learned. It also looks ahead; reflecting on the implications this project has for the future of ministry, both in my immediate ministry context and the larger Christian community.

This project developed a spiritual formation experience that introduced the people of Longview Community Church to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. The Exercises presents an approach to spiritual formation that not only changes people’s thinking but also reorients the desires and commitments of their hearts. Through reflective meditation, imaginative contemplation, and the prayer of examen, the Exercises helps people move beyond mere insight into a transformative encounter with the love of God. Ignatius states that the purpose of his Exercises is “for increasing openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, for helping to bring to light the darkness of sinfulness and sinful tendencies within ourselves, and for strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond faithfully to the love of God.”

The Exercises seeks to help people discover a spiritual freedom that enables them to respond to God from the heart.

This approach to spiritual formation provides a helpful corrective to the predominant models of discipleship in the contemporary church, which often focus more on informing minds instead of transforming hearts. Informational models of discipleship fall short of the New Testament vision of the spiritual life, which calls people into a

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transformative love relationship with God. Jesus calls people to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and love their neighbors as themselves. God is not simply a concept to be understood but a person one loves. Models of discipleship that overlook this holistic vision of spiritual formation fail to help people experience the fullness of life with God.

This project culminated in a nine-week spiritual formation experience titled, Encounter: A Spiritual Formation Retreat in Daily Life. The overarching goal of the Encounter retreat was to help the people of Longview Community Church encounter and respond to the love of God as they engaged in the prayer practices outlined in Ignatius’ of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The five desired outcomes of this project were to facilitate an increased capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture, awareness of God in daily life, openness to God, freedom from disordered loves, and desire to love and serve God. As spiritual formation is a slow process, this project did not presume that these goals would be fully realized after a nine-week period. The hope was that there would be signs of movement and growth in these areas.

The evaluation of the Encounter retreat showed numerous signs of movement in these five areas. This project helped many people encounter God in scripture. A woman discovered “peace beyond words” as she heard God’s words in Isaiah 43, “you are mine,” spoken directly to her. A man discovered God’s personal love for him when inserting his name into John 3:16. A woman wept like never before as she imagined herself into the crucifixion scene and heard Jesus speak a word of forgiveness to her directly.

Some participants described an increased awareness of God in everyday life. A woman discovered God’s presence in the suffering eyes of a women in a memory care
unit, a man was captured by the wonder of the birds and flowers in his backyard, and numerous people traced God’s faithfulness as they looked back over their life story. Through the prayer of examen, many discovered God in their everyday conversations and experiences.

Participants reported an increased openness to God. Many participants worked through some unhelpful images of God and discovered that God likes them, is not out to get them, and does not just want them to be a worker but also a friend. Other participants experienced an increased openness toward God by discovering a renewed desire for prayer and meditation. Still others discovered the power of lament and were able to be open and honest with God.

Participants described experiences of freedom from things like anxiety and materialism. One participant discovered freedom from the anxiety of aging, while another was able to let go of some of the fear she had for her children. One participant described the “amputation of my appetites,” and found contentment with a simpler lifestyle.

The Encounter retreat also motivated many participants to respond to God through devotion and service. Some participants discovered a renewed passion for ministry at home, in the community, and at church. As participants encountered the love of God, many discovered a desire to reach out to others. The Encounter retreat in daily life clearly demonstrated that the Ignatian Exercises combined with spiritual direction and group support and interaction, deepen participants’ ability to encounter and respond to the love of God personally and in service to others.

While Encounter has proven to be fruitful in many ways, there are some things I would do differently if running it again. I would increase the ratio of spiritual directors to
the group size or reduce the number of participants. It was hard to lead Encounter well with fourteen people. As I was the only trained spiritual director leading the group, I did not have adequate time to connect with each participant as much as I felt was necessary. Many participants indicated that one-on-one spiritual direction was the most helpful part of the experience. With a smaller group I would be able to increase these sessions and be more available to help people work through the challenges they encounter in their prayer times. A couple people entered the Encounter retreat during a difficult season in their life, and this made it hard for them to engage the practices. Another participant was in a very busy seasons in life and struggled to find space for prayer. If the group was smaller I could have been more available support people when they faced challenges, or adapt the material to their situation.

It would also be helpful to increase the number of group sessions included in the Encounter retreat. The level of intimacy and depth required for effective contemplative sharing takes time to develop. Some people indicated that the group time felt awkward and forced. It would have been helpful for these groups to work on developing relationships before delving into deep sharing. Some initial group sessions focusing on community building would have been helpful.

Looking ahead, there are a number of ways the insights gained from this ministry initiative will inform my approach to ministry. First, this project has instilled within me a desire to continue to find ways to help people engage with the Ignatian Exercises. One of the hopes I have for the future is to lead a smaller group of three to five people through the entire Exercises each year. The cumulative effect of doing this each year during my remaining years in ministry would be significant.
Ignatius’ approach to spiritual formation in the *Exercises* can also be implemented in smaller, less formal ways in the church. One does not need to embark on the entire *Exercises* to benefit from Ignatian prayer. People can gain exposure and experience with the forms of prayer outlined in the *Exercises* through weekend retreats, short-term gospel meditation groups, or resources for personal prayer. Having witnessed the fruitfulness of the Ignatian approach to meditation and contemplation, I am inclined to incorporate these methods of scripture reading into the reading guides our church puts together to coincide with sermon series and the Lenten and Advent seasons.

This project also informs my approach to small group ministry. The Encounter retreat experimented with a contemplative sharing group model, which differs from other types of small groups. Contemplative sharing groups are not focused on discussing theological ideas, but on helping people share and listen to each other’s spiritual experiences.² There are a variety of different approaches to contemplative sharing groups. Some are geared towards group spiritual direction, where people bring previous spiritual experiences to the group session.³ Other models encourage people to practice scripture meditation together and share their experiences in the group.⁴ Both models provide a helpful balance to the predominant small group models used in my church, which often focus more on discussing books rather than helping people get in touch with their spiritual experiences. It is significant to note that Ignatius did not write any theological treaties; instead, he wrote a book of exercises. Perhaps the church can learn from this


legacy. Perhaps the church needs fewer textbooks to discuss and more exercise books to practice. Ignatius encourages people to not simply talk about God but to encounter God. This insight has the potential to transform the format and curriculum often used in small groups.

The insights gained in this project also have implications for the larger Christian community. Over the past few decades, the church in the West has had to adapt to an increasingly post-Christian culture. The first chapter of this project explored how postmodernism and globalism have contributed to people’s increasing skepticism toward the institutional church. This is amplified in the Pacific Northwest, where 63 percent of the population is not affiliated with any religious organization, and the largest religious demographic in the Northwest are the religious ‘nones,’ a group that chooses no religious affiliation.

The church can respond to its institutional decline in a number of ways. It can try and become attractional by shaping its ecclesiology to appeal to the interests and desires of un-churched people. It can become missional by making outreach the center of ecclesiology and equipping people to live their faith out in the community. It can be formational and focus on the spiritual lives of its membership, with the hopes that this will equip them to reach out to others.

The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation provides a balanced perspective on how to engage this current contemporary moment. Ignatius recognizes the first calling of

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the church is to make disciples who are transformed by the love of God. He writes, “He who goes about to reform the world must begin with himself, or he loses his labor.”\(^7\) At the same time, the *Exercises* propel people back out into the world. Ignatius commissions God’s people to “go set the world on fire.”\(^8\) By inviting people to abide in God’s love, discover spiritual freedom, find God in all things, and discern God’s call, the *Exercises* can form authentic witnesses who engage culture with a renewed missional vigor. The Ignatian approach to spiritual formation also may be attractive to postmodern spiritual seekers. While this project did not fully develop this idea, it explored how the experiential aspects of Ignatian spirituality may connect with those who claim to be spiritual but not religious. Indeed, there are examples of how the Ignatian style of scripture meditation is gaining traction as a means of outreach in post-Christian contexts. David Watson and Paul Watson explore this in their book *Contagious Disciple Making*.\(^9\) This is an area for further study and exploration.

Overall, Ignatius suggests the most important transformation that must take place in the church is the transformation of the human heart. Effective ministry is dependent on forming disciples who not only have informed minds but changed hearts; disciples who are so captured by the love of God that the foundational desire of their heart is to love God and love others; disciples who can pray with authenticity and honesty, the prayer with which Ignatius ends his *Exercises*: “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my

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memory, my understanding, and my entire will – all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.”

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10 David Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 177.
APPENDIX A

Encounter: End of Retreat Evaluation

I. General questions about the state of your spiritual life at the end of the retreat:

1. On a general level I would describe my spiritual life as:
   
   Stalled—Somewhat Stalled—Somewhat Growing—Growing—Thriving

2. On a scale of 1-5—with one being very closed and five being very open—how open or trusting do you feel to God’s leading in your life?
   
   1—2—3—4—5

3. I would describe my prayer life as:
   
   Cold—Luke Warm—Warm—Hot

4. How connected do you feel God is to your everyday life?
   

5. How present does God seem to you during prayer?
   
   Absent—Somewhat Absent—Somewhat Present—Very Present

6. What priority does God have in your life right now?
   
   Low Priority—Small Priority—Significant Priority—Top Priority

II. General reflections on the Encounter retreat

Did you have any significant experiences, insights, or breakthroughs during this retreat that you would be willing to share? Perhaps you might look back on your journal to discover some key moments.
III. Evaluating the desired outcomes of the retreat

In this project I am exploring whether Ignatian prayer facilitates an increased openness toward God, freedom from attachments, desire to love and serve God, capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture, and awareness of God in everyday life. Have you experienced any movement or growth in these five areas? If so, do you have any specific examples you’d be willing to share? (Do not feel the need to comment on every area if there is not anything that comes to mind.)

1. Increased openness toward God:
   Circle One: No increase—somewhat increased—significantly increased
   Comments/ Examples:

2. Increased freedom from attachments:
   Circle One: No increase—somewhat increased—significantly increased
   Comments/ Examples:

3. Increased desire to love and serve God:
   Circle One: No increase—somewhat increased—significantly increased
   Comments/ Examples:

4. Increased capacity for an experiential encounter with God in scripture:
   Circle One: No increase—somewhat increased—significantly increased
   Comments/ Examples:

5. Increased Awareness of God in everyday life:
   Circle One: No increase—somewhat increased—significantly increased
   Comments/ Examples:

IV. Program Evaluation
There were 4 components to our retreat. Please evaluate the effectiveness of these components with 1 being unhelpful and 5 being very helpful.

1. Orientation Day
   1—2—3—4—5
   Comments:

2. Daily Practices
   Scripture Meditation
   1—2—3—4—5
   Imaginative Contemplation on Scripture
   1—2—3—4—5
   Prayer of Examen
   1—2—3—4—5
   Journaling
   1—2—3—4—5
   Spiritual Autobiography
   1—2—3—4—5
   Comments:

3. Spiritual direction sessions with facilitator
   1—2—3—4—5
   Comments:

4. Contemplative Sharing groups
   1—2—3—4—5
   Comments:

5. What was most helpful about the Encounter retreat?

6. Do you have any suggestions for ways this program could be improved
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