

Teaching Ignatian Spirituality

The #IgnatianRace14 and the Pedagogical and
Sociological challenges in Undergraduate Jesuit
Universities

Danyelle Kelly

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This essay explores the impact of social media and the transformative effect that it has when teaching undergraduate students from a Jesuit university.

Introduction

Education is an experience which enhances student performance and encourages participation across a wide variety of mediums and cultural contexts to help the individual create their own world view. This is particularly evident when teaching Ignatian Spirituality in Jesuit universities. Many students enter the undergraduate classroom without an understanding of Ignatian Spirituality or how this spirituality fits into Catholic belief and practice. Similarly, when a team of American scientists produced a documentary on the first atomic bomb; the most horrible understanding “is not that mushroom shape that appears in our dreams and lurks just over our waking horizon. Instead it is the image of intelligent and educated people... devoting themselves so enthusiastically to such demonic ends.”¹ The students that have walked into the undergraduate class have little to no understanding of Ignatian Spirituality, in juxtaposition they have been saturated with images and media that is seeped often in demonic tendencies, congruent with the image of the atomic bomb. A narrative that these students encounter is that to become ‘someone’ they need to work hard at school to get accepted into a good college, at college work hard so that you can obtain a good internship, work hard in the internship, to then work hard in a fulltime job so that you can buy items that the media presents. All the while these students are being bombarded by social media and other influences such as gaming and visual media. Heldman states that “new technology has increased the sheer number of images that you are exposed to everyday. In the 70’s, we saw about 500 ads a day. Now, we see about 5,000 ads a day.”² The predominant narrative of hard work that is fed to our students can make engaging in spirituality and prayer a challenging task for students and instructors as it generally involves cultivating a shift in world view. Secondly, as hooks describes “bourgeois values in the classroom create a barrier, blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict, warding off

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 1.

² Caroline Heldman, "The Sexy Lie," *Everyday Feminism*, accessed June 01, 2014, <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/02/the-sexy-lie/>.

dissent. Students are often silenced by means of their acceptance of class values that teach them to maintain order at all costs.”³ Comparing this idea of blindly accepting class values and the capitalistic notion of hard work in terms of creating a sense of pride and freedom, is something that can completely hinder and contradict the very essence of the undergraduate course in Ignatian Spirituality. Thirdly, the way in which the educator expounds the teaching material to facilitate learning is paramount to the success of the course. Freire states “education is suffering from narration sickness. The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students.”⁴ The success of the course is dependent on a number of factors that relate to these three narratives.

The barriers created by the notion of hard work and materialistic need to be explored and students are encouraged to seek different ways of understanding so as to gain a sense of peace from contemplation, a practice needed in today’s ‘busy’ lifestyle. As discussed by Burghardt “this, I am afraid, is a thesis that dominates much of American culture today: what is important is usefulness, the profit I can extract from an experience of a possession.”⁵ Furthermore, Burghardt describes that contemplation is to be in love. This contemplation is not about getting to the nothing, in contrast, it is about getting to the everything.

How do we as educators get to the everything in a 10 week course for undergraduates, whose world view is shaped by these narratives of hard work and class structures? The banking concept as described by Freire is “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” conversely hinders the education of the student – particularly when the course is essentially trying to get them to the

³ Bell Hooks, "Confronting Class in the Classroom," in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 143.

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 71.

⁵ Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real," in *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader*, by George W. Traub (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 90.

everything. When a teacher teaches and the students are taught, or, when the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing, an open dialogue and classroom setting has been diminished from the initial standpoint. The banking concept, particularly in an undergraduate Ignatian Spirituality course, should be completely rejected. Instead in turn we should be concerned with the problems of “human beings in their relations with the world.”⁶

How do we work together to help these students to engage in Ignatian Spirituality whilst their worldviews are focused on completing their engineering, business or arts and science degree? All the while being aware of our own worldviews as educators and fostering an environment that resonates with the changing shape of education that uses different mediums to respond to class stimuli (focusing the education through different mediums, rather than just a text book).

As a result the Professor and I engaged in a unique undergraduate classroom activity that centred around the social media site Twitter. This integrated their love for social media and easily tracked the response of students over 10 weeks. It was apparent that the students developed holistically through this approach and endeavoured to find God (or the divine for those who may not identify as Christian) in all things.

Key Terms and Presuppositions

As a teacher delving into an area of mostly uncharted waters whereby engaging students through an online twitter forum, I initially sought ideas and responses to how this was not only going to enhance the knowledge of these students in the area of Ignatian Spirituality but how it is pedagogically aligned with my own teaching and that of the university. Interestingly, I turned to *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* and the leading question “how have certain pedagogical practices become so habitual or natural in school settings that teachers accept them as normal,

⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.

unproblematic, and expected?”⁷ This question resonated in my ‘unorthodox’ approach to using social media as tool when teaching Ignatian Spirituality. Hooks explores this idea further of the advantage of academic discussions stating:

When professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. But most professors must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body and spirit.⁸

It also resounded with Freire’s idea of the banking concept whereby the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing. This was not the idea, the students were encouraged to share and reflect their own world context, the Professor and I focused on our own world context and together using Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development created a standardised classroom model on allowing and fostering the educated responses, ideas and discussions for the #IgnatianRace14 task. Thereby engaging in the mission of Santa Clara University by educating “citizens and leaders of competence, conscience, and compassion and cultivate knowledge and faith to build a more humane, just, and sustainable world.”⁹

Another presupposition to be addressed is the idea of teaching Ignatian Spirituality, an innately Catholic spirituality, to students that may not identify with Catholicism or Christianity in general. The wording of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit may be words that cause immediate discomfort for those not familiar or not exposed to how these terms are going to enhance the students’ understanding of the course. To combat this, the Professor of the course clearly stated that: this course was not defined to evangelize the students into Catholicism, merely, that these terms are used to cultivate an understanding of the richness found throughout Ignatian Spirituality which

⁷ Peter McLaren, "Critical Pedagogy: A Look at the Major Concepts," in *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 82.

⁸ Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21.

⁹ "Santa Clara University," - University Mission, Vision, and Values Statement, accessed June 01, 2014, <http://www.scu.edu/jesuit/University-Mission.cfm>.

can be re-contextualised into the environment of the student. Through this practice a sense of peace is immediately found and the student is shifted into a focus of the historical context of Saint Ignatius and how this can enhance not only the student's personal life, but also their future work life.

The key terms associated with this activity are Twitter (a social media platform for students to show case their results), #IgnatianRace14 (the hash tag that groups the students responses), @IgnatiusNow (the public profile set up by Professor Drescher to act as Saint Ignatius would if he were on Twitter today). Additionally the undergraduate Santa Clara University (SCU) students were required to take part in a volunteering capacity at Santa Maria Urban Ministry (SMUM) in San Jose, CA (see Appendix 1) and were given the option of extra credit by attending the monthly St Vincent De Paul Santa Clara University volunteer project of feeding and ministering to those suffering from homelessness in St. James Park, San Jose, CA (see Appendix 2). These volunteering actions were integrated into the design and response of the *Ignatian Race 2014* with the students encouraged to use these encounters as a lived response to several of the tasks (see Appendix 4.7 Wk 7, 4.8 Wk 8 and 4.1.2 Wk 10).

Throughout the remainder of this essay I will showcase strategies for pursuing what Scheid and Vasko refer to as “objective” and “transformational” learning. “By objective learning goals and strategies we mean to indicate that there are certain facts we want students to learn.”¹⁰ For example, they should be able to recall particular details of Saint Ignatius’ life and, to articulate why Saint Ignatius developed the Spiritual Exercises. “These are matters of objective knowledge and diligent students can absorb and articulate this knowledge if educators use effective pedagogical strategies for teaching and assessing objective learning.”¹¹ Ultimately these transformational learning goals, seen as the outcomes of the student responses in the

¹⁰ Anna Floerke Scheid and Elisabeth T. Vasko, "Teaching Race: Pedagogical Challenges in Predominantly White Undergraduate Theology Classrooms," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 17, no. 1 (2014), doi:10.1111/teth.12157.

¹¹ Scheid and Vasko, "Teaching Race: Pedagogical Challenges in Predominantly White Undergraduate Theology Classrooms".

#IgnatianRace14, are ways that as educators we can start to assess the development in personal and communal spirituality by seeing their minds, attitudes and assumptions be transformed by the learning in association with social media, classroom practice and volunteering action. As described by Glennon, transformation is “understood as enabling students to critically examine and rethink prior cognitive and behavioral frameworks to become broader, more inclusive, and more self-regulated.”¹² Therefore, transformational learning in this activity is promoting the search for truth and promotion of justice seen through Saint Ignatius and how the Spiritual Exercises can openly encourage the participant in the contemplation of love.

Study Design and Participant Demographics

This design of the Ignatian Race came out of a lived relational pedagogy. Elizabeth Drescher (the Professor of the course) and I share a similarity in pedagogical teaching practices. With the mentor, mentee relationship that we share (I am the mentee) Professor Drescher has a vested interest in my cultivation as an educated professional. We utilize social media to share inspiring educational works, to communicate thereby enhancing our professional relationship on a different platform. Through our lived relational pedagogy, whereby I enhance my personal pedagogy through mentorship from Professor Drescher, I was encouraged to start a blog. This blog is a platform that showcases my education within Santa Clara University to share and network with other educated professionals. Additionally this blog is also a memoir for experiences that I have in the United States (as I am an Australian international student). One of these personal experiences that I published was the *Amazing Race of Silicon Valley*.¹³ This was a race that I devised to celebrate my friend’s 30th birthday. It was quite an event and something that caught the attention of Professor Drescher. At a meet up with another academic colleague a lived relational pedagogical ‘ah ha’ moment presented itself. I had been invited to assist in the

¹² Fred Glennon, "Promoting Freedom, Responsibility, and Learning in the Classroom: The Learning Covenant a Decade Later," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 11, no. 1 (2008): 33, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2007.00394.x.

¹³ Danyelle E. Kelly, "Nay Version 3.0 - The Amazing Race of Silicon Valley," *See Hear Speak No Evil*, March 25, 2014, accessed June 04, 2014, <http://danyekelly.wordpress.com/2014/03/25/theamazingraceofsiliconvalley/>.

course Ignatian Spirituality lead by Professor Drescher and it seemed highly appropriate and relevant that we create *The Ignatian Race*, inspired by my personal experience in the development of re-contextualising the television show *The Amazing Race*.

This activity occurred over the Spring 2014 and involved undergraduate students from a host of different disciplines.

Program and Plan	Level	Sex
Undergraduate Arts & Sciences <i>Disciplines:</i> Economics Political Science Values Science Technology History Communication Ancient Studies Mathematics Computer Science Chemistry Sustainability Environmental Science Music Race Place & Social Inequalities	5 x Senior 5x Junior	2 x Female 8 x Male
Undergraduate Engineering <i>Disciplines:</i> Civil Engineering Sustainability The Digital Age Web Design and Engineering Music Computer Science & Engineering Paradigm Shifts Mechanical Engineering Design Thinking	6 x Senior 2x Junior	2 x Female 6 x Male
Undergraduate Business <i>Disciplines:</i> Undeclared Business Marketing Leading People, Org & Soc Chng Finance Design Thinking Economics (BSC) Sustainability	1 x Sophomore 5 x Senior 4 x Junior	5 x Male 5 x Female

Entrepreneurship Retail Studies Management English		
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A total of 28 students were in attendance and completed the activities over the 10 week course. 68% of the class were male and 32% female, the highest percent of females were in the Business school, whereas the Arts and Science school was the highest percent of males in attendance for the class. It is required that all students enrolled at Santa Clara University attend two Religious Studies courses. These students choose Ignatian Spirituality as one of the Religious Studies courses to add to their student port folio prior to graduation. Interestingly none of the students are majors or minors in the Religious Studies program.

The advantage to the students is by partaking in this task is if the student is in one of the top 5 places of the weekly tasks they get an extra .5 boost on their final grade. If the student is consistently participating and placing in this top 5 list, they could potentially have an extra 5 points added to their final grade. Additionally, Professor Drescher organized with Fr Jim Martin, SJ, to sign copies of his book to give to the top 3 contributors over the 10 week course. Interestingly the top 3 participants was a Junior male in the Arts & Sciences, the other 2 winners was a female (Senior) and male (Junior) in the Business school.

Results

Transformational and objective learning occurred through many facets of the #IgnatianRace14 activity. A student's response to the Week 2 exercises of taking an hour of silence and being with your thoughts was truly transformational. The student states:

Before this class I believed the only way to sin was by your actions. It came by a surprise to me that you could sin by words and even by your thoughts. This was actually one of the things I focused on when we took one

hour of silence. I usually let my thoughts whiz through me without thinking too much about them but as I sat in silence I tried to pay attention to my sinful thoughts. Before this I would usually dwell on these evil thoughts because I did not think it was a sin to do so. However this time I tried to avoid them, for example the big ones would be lustful and envious thoughts, but this practice was a lot harder to execute then I thought it would be. (Appendix 3.1)

This student continues on by explaining they were sitting next to a cute person and their mind kept wandering to think about this person. Overtly, this student has made a transformational experience and is able to acknowledge the Ignatian idea of being at balance and equilibrium, the student is starting to explore the effect of just a part of Week 1 in the Spiritual Exercises.

Another student responded to this same task. Resonating the sentiments of the discussion seen in the introduction of this essay, the influence of hard work and to succeed, is to be busy. The student states:

The problem with being busy is that even when you do not have anything to do, you want to fill it with something or do something. Having a quiet time to reflect and spend with God is hard. I was honestly really happy when the twitter assignment for week two was to spend an hour in reflection and find balance. Since it was an assignment to reflect about balance I had to do it. No excuses. (Appendix 3.2)

Furthermore, not only did the student have “no excuses” to not find equilibrium and balance due to the requirement of the assignment, but the student had been yearning for a similar experience to appear. The student having not had this stimulus may have never questioned the notion of a time without interruption, even though yearning for it. This task, similar to the other tasks, asks the student to engage within the text. To actively participate in what they are analysing, and to respond on the communal online twitter forum. In Appendix 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 a variety of responses to the activities are showcased. Furthermore for a full listing of the student responses and the transformational learning they encountered can be found online at the Twitter page @IgnatiusNow.

Conclusion

Overall this activity was extremely successful for the students using objective activities to create transformational responses in a time when students actively respond to visual cues with social media. Using this to re-contextualise a traditional classroom model of the teacher centred approach, all the while incorporating the volunteering activities and online presence made for a dynamic and engaging class.

For future classes I would weight each of these activities as a whole at 10% of their grade, rather than giving a .5 point for the top 5 contributors. Even though that would take the race component out of the equation, I believe it may be an easier and more strategic way to monitor student responses.

One thing that would have enhanced the #IgnatianRace14 activity response is to have a deeper understanding of the students backgrounds in relationship with religious organizations. For example: providing an anonymous questionnaire to the students in the initial stages of the course (Week 1 or 2) to develop an understanding of the students backgrounds in religious affiliation. Some questions that could create this understanding would be what do you identify with religiously (Christian, Judaism, None etc)? Describe these words and what they mean to you (God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit). Who is Saint Ignatius and what do you know of the Spiritual Exercises? Why did you choose Ignatian Spirituality? Additionally, it would be advantageous to do a similar questionnaire at the end of the course to decipher the student response to the online #IgnatianRace14 activity. Even though it is difficult to reflect quickly on a task that may not resonate in a person's life until there is just cause. For example the student response could be that "this task was something that was irrelevant in my life" now. However, the student may not foresee the benefit of having these tasks in their journey of life portfolio, their response may differ when they have their first born child and have experienced sleepless nights. To have the hour of silence (see Appendix 4.2 Wk 2) as a mindful practice and to be able to regain a

contemplation of love through this, and remembering the other tasks they practiced through the 10 weeks (which would still be available in 10 years time for them to access through the Twitter account) may offer a different insight to that of the initial “it doesn’t resonate in my life” now. Education is not stagnate and moves through ones’ life. Having the tools in the toolbox to handle situations as they arise is the aim of the education.

I encourage future educators in this field to take advantage of the online world. This is an uncharted territory that has untapped potential in the development of transformational learning. Finally, similar to Ignatius who transformed the idea of spirituality for not only practicing Jesuits but the students and participants in Ignatian Spirituality from the 16th century to today, Ignatian Spirituality at Santa Clara University is partaking in a similar transformation that has enhanced the spiritual growth of those students that have participated and provided tools in their spirituality toolbox to assist in their path through life.

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Appendix

1. Santa Maria Urban Ministry – SCU students volunteering in assisting a group of young adults.



2. Sand Clara University students attending St Vincent de Paul Knightriders program (St. James park, San Jose, CA) – feeding and ministering those who suffer from homelessness.



3.1 Student response to Week 2 #IgnatianRace14 activity

week by week to see if there was improvement. Many of us
commit a certain sin each day, so this visual representation allows us to keep in perspective if we
are improving or not. More examples of his exercises in practice take place while he is residing
in Manresa. While in the city he hears a voice with in his soul that tells him, "How will you be
able to endure this life for the seventy years you have to live?" Sensing it was an enemy he
answers, "Wretch? Can you promise me an hour of your life?" and so he overcame the
temptation and remained at peace. As a part of the general examination of the conscious to
purify yourself it is important that you are able to recognize the three kinds of thoughts; Those
thoughts that are your own which come from yourself and then the two which come from
outside yourself, the one from the good spirit and the other from evil. You can merit from an evil
thought by resisting it immediately as seen by Ignatius above. Before this class I believed that
the only way you could sin was by your actions. It came by a surprise to me that you could sin by
words and by even your thoughts. This was actually one of the things I focused on when we took
our hour of silence. I usually just let my thoughts whiz through me without thinking too much
about them but as I sat in silence I tried to pay attention to my sinful thoughts. Before this I
would usually dwell on these evil thoughts because I did not think it was sin to do so. However
this time I tried to avoid them, for example the big ones would be lustful and envious thoughts,
but this practice was a lot harder to execute then I thought it would be. For example a really cute
girl I was sitting there and I am sure you can guess what I was not trying to

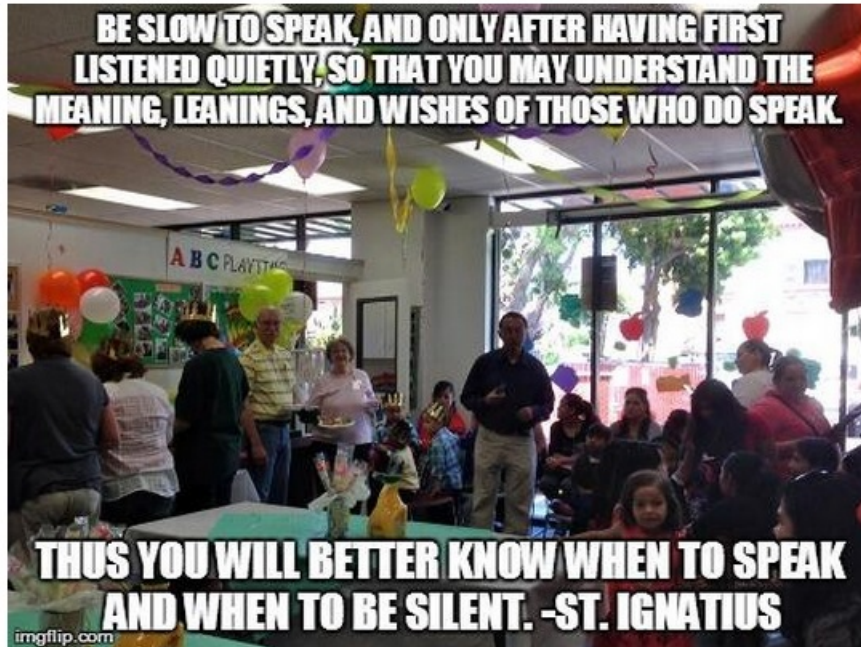
3.2

and turned the other way. I have found so many of my past
habits are hard, but I would say it is also so worth it.
I have worked out many aspects and elements in my life, but there are times where I will lapse
into my past ways and have to work at it again. It is discouraging to fall back, but I reflect upon the
progress that I have made find that it is worth getting back up and continuing to move forward. There is
a plaque in a waiting room that I read every time I am there that reads "Our greatest glory is not failing,
but getting up every time we do." It is so encouraging to read that plaque, but it is also so easy to forget
and be discouraged.
Being in college has made me an incredibly busy person. I find that I am always putting things
into my schedule even if I am already really busy. Finding the balance in my schedule has been
incredibly hard as I want to be a part of so many things. The problem with being busy is that even
when you do not have anything to do, you want to fill it with something or do something. Having a
quiet time to reflect and spend with God is hard. I was honestly really happy when the twitter
assignment for week two was to spend an hour in reflection and find balance. Since it was an
assignment to reflect about balance I had to do it. No excuses. I realized quite quickly that I was

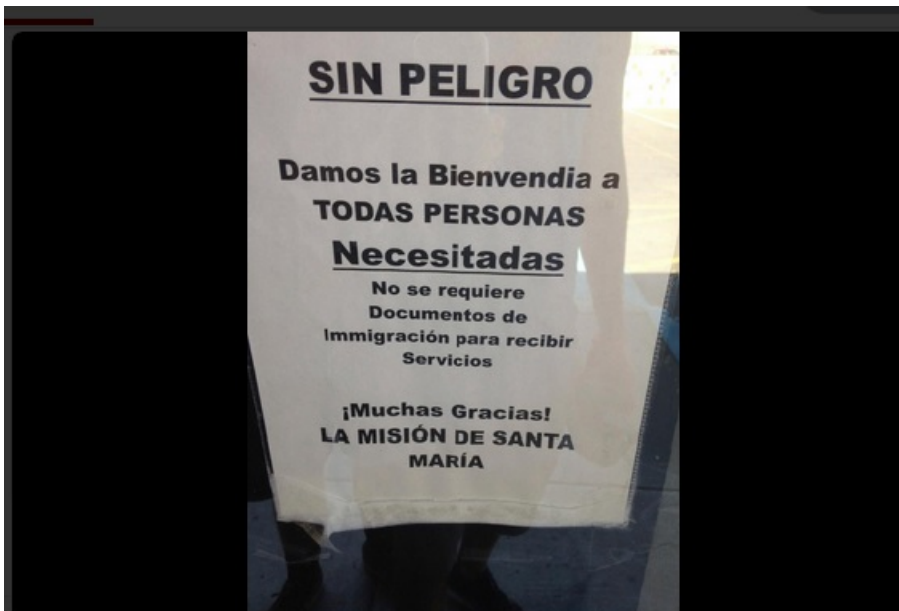
3.3

@IgnatiusNow #IgnatianRace14 #Week10
pic.twitter.com/hVUXuFbFFi

Reply Retweeted Favorite More



3.4



Omead E @brOmead1 · Jun 2

@IgnatiusNow #IgnatianRace14 #Week10 Iggy: "Lord teach me to be generous" applies to ALL, citizen or not. bravo SMUM pic.twitter.com/SXUmhD1cWk

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3.5

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SAINT IGNATIUS LOYOLA

WE ARE LOVE AND CREATED LIFE FOR TO SHARE ETERNITY IN GOD'S



Alyssa Bernauer @aabermauer · May 14

The kids at SMUM don't always have the same chances #equalityforall #IgnatianRace14 #Week7 #2 @IgnatiusNow pic.twitter.com/hJLzj9b7O



"I can be pretty sure that my children's teachers will tolerate them if they fit school norms; my chief concerns about them do no concern others' attitudes toward their race."

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