



**Christian Life
Community**

*praying our life
and living our prayer*

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius



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INTRODUCTION

Ignatius first wrote down the Exercises as a record of his own experiences as God led him through his conversion from a glory-seeking minor aristocrat to a loving, humble and totally committed follower of Christ. Later he found that, by recognising the different stages through which God led him, he could help other people to gain the interior freedom in which to hear and respond generously to God's call - in their own way.

Over the years, the experience of doing the Exercises proposed by Ignatius has come to be called a 'retreat', but it is a special kind of retreat in which each retreatant has a personal guide (the 'Director') and follows a pattern of prayer based on the structured process worked out by Ignatius but also on the retreatant's own personal relationship with God.

At regular intervals the retreatant tells the guide about the feelings and responses experienced in prayer and the guide helps to make sense of what is happening and suggests meditations for each day to suit the personality, needs and progress of the person. The skill of the guide lies in helping the retreatant to recognise where the Holy Spirit is leading and in suggesting subjects for meditation (and sometimes methods of prayer) which will best follow that lead.

There are several different ways of experiencing the Spiritual Exercises, to suit individual circumstances, and some of these are explained later in this leaflet.

Because the Exercises were designed to be spread over thirty days, Ignatius split them into four 'weeks', but each retreatant moves through the Exercises at their own pace, staying as long as necessary at each stage.

GENERAL PRINCIPLE 5



“We hold the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius ...”

The experience of one or other form of Ignatian retreat is an important step in the life of a person who wants to come closer to God through membership of a CLC, but there are other ways in which the Spiritual Exercises are relevant.

... as the specific source .. .

The CLC way of life is based on ideas which Ignatius developed out of his own experience - knowing Jesus through meditation on the gospels, recognising the Holy Spirit's action in our lives through reflecting on our attitudes and feelings, encouraging each other by sharing our journeys of faith with other members of our group, helping each other to 'hear' God's call and to disentangle it from the pull of our own desires, finding Christ in every aspect of our daily lives.

... and characteristic instrument of our spirituality.

Ignatius wrote down details of all the meditations, with explanations of their purpose, together with a series of notes ('annotations') to help the guide. But the Spiritual Exercises also contain useful instruction about methods of prayer (such as Ignatian contemplation and the Examen), making choices, discernment, finding Christ in all things, thinking with the Church etc. These Ignatian methods form an important part of the spiritual life of CLCers, although we do not always recognise their origin in the Exercises.

The official text of General Principles 1-13; a paraphrased version for England and Wales; and the full General Principles, including the General Norms and a commentary from the World Secretariat are available from:

**CLC, 114 Mount Street, London, W1K 3AH
or literature@clcew.org.uk**

Principle and foundation This is an introductory statement at the beginning of the Exercises about why God made the world and us and how we should live. St Ignatius advises the retreatant to read it over several times each day; it is sometimes regarded as a part of the first week and sometimes as a separate introductory section. A modern paraphrase is available from the CLC office.

Colloquy This simply means conversation; each exercise should lead into a natural expression of our feelings to God.

Contemplation Ignatian contemplation is a particular method of prayer in which we try to be present through our imagination in a scene from the gospels, actually taking part in it. A leaflet about this is available from the CLC office.

Consolation The state in which we experience strong feelings (of love, thanks, sorrow, faith, closeness) drawing us towards God.

Desolation The state in which we are drawn away from God by feelings of confusion and darkness and a sense of God's absence.

Discernment of spirits The way of identifying the movements or feelings inside us (such as consolation or desolation) and evaluating the direction in which they are leading us (towards or away from God).

A leaflet about consolation, desolation and the discernment of spirits is available from the CLC office.

Director A guide or companion to one making the Exercises. Guides do not have to be Jesuits; they come from all denominations, clergy, religious and lay people.

Election Choice or decision - the Exercises are often made when a person is trying to decide on a future mode of life and Ignatius recommends that the choice (or affirmation of a choice already made) should be made at the end of the second week

IGNATIAN LANGUAGE

Examen Sometimes known as examination of consciousness or awareness, a form of prayer strongly recommended by Ignatius in which each day we look back to sense how God has touched us during the day and how we have responded. A leaflet '**The Review of the Day**' about the Examen is available from the CLC office or literature@clcew.org.uk

Weeks Phases in the Exercises, *not* equivalent to seven days nor of equal lengths.

Some individual exercises/meditations (particularly in the second week) have become known by their titles, such as **The Kingdom**, the **Two Standards**, and the **Three Degrees of Humility**.

A summary of the themes and structures of the Spiritual Exercises

God created me and the whole world out of love;
I need to be free in order to choose **Him**.

- Wk1 God's mercy - leads me to recognise that I am constrained by sin and can be freed by God's forgiving love.
- Wk2 Jesus Christ - in contemplating His incarnation and life I hear His call to follow Him.
- Wk3 The implications of discipleship - being with Jesus in His passion and death.
- Wk4 Christ's resurrection gives us the power to respond freely and totally in love for God.

Forms of the Exercises

A *Place:* residential, eg a retreat house. *Time:* 30 days.

This is the original or full Exercises, sometimes known as a 30-day retreat. The retreatant meets the guide daily but is mainly alone and silent to ensure attention to God.

B *Place:* daily life. *Time:* 9 to 12 months.

This form is known as 19th Annotation or Exercises in Daily Life or EDL. All the Exercises are undertaken, but the retreatant continues normal life, giving at least one hour per day to prayer and seeing the guide once a week.

A and B are the only ways of doing THE Spiritual Exercises. A person would normally make the full Exercises at turning points in life and probably only once or twice at, say, twenty year intervals. However many shorter forms have been developed; Ignatius suggested in his 'annotation 18' that people who are not ready for the full Exercises should only do the first 'week', or the retreatant can go through a speeded-up, and therefore less deep, version of the full Exercises - whatever is most appropriate to the person's current prayer life and relationship to God. **A version has been developed for Christian Life Community groups.**

It is always essential to find a guide who is experienced and with whom you feel comfortable so that you can talk over which would be the most suitable form for you to try.

C *Place:* residential *Time:* 8 days (or 5, 6 or 7)

This is the 8-day individually guided retreat (IGR) or individually directed retreat (IDR). Usually a retreat house will gather a number of guides for a specific week and there will be a large group of people making the retreat, but each person has an individual guide and will be given exercises/meditations to suit their own needs and pace. Alternatively you can arrange to stay in a retreat house at a time to suit you, provided that a director is available to guide you.

D *Place: daily life Time: a week or longer*

This form is known as a *Week of Guided Prayer*. A team of guides goes into an area or parish every day for a week. Each retreatant spends some time in private prayer each day and has a one-to-one meeting with a guide to reflect on the day, their prayer and God's presence in both. This form can suit a local CLC with a single guide staying at one member's home.

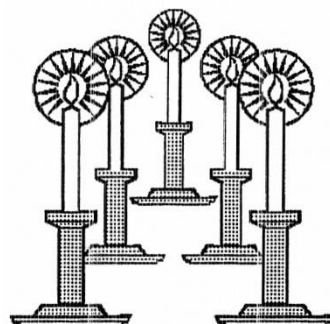
The forms listed are familiar to CLC but there are new experiments all the time; for instance the Exercises in Daily Life have been done by correspondence. Because many people are not ready to do the Exercises several 'retreats' or programmes have been designed to introduce Ignatian ideas and as a preparation for the Exercises.

E *Place: a retreat house. Time: a week end.*

This is known to some as a 'listening weekend', where the leader proposes a series of meditations for individual prayer followed by sharing in a group after each period of prayer. This format is probably more appropriate as a workshop on Ignatian ways of prayer.

F *The Open Door or At Home retreat.*

A group of people commit themselves to at least 15 minutes of prayer each day and a meeting together once a week for about ten weeks. At the weekly meeting the group members share on their experience of prayer in the preceding week and then the leader(s) provide 'input' and give out papers containing the subjects for prayer for the next week. The content follows the form of the Spiritual Exercises and there is emphasis on discovering and sharing how God has touched their lives in the past week. Music and activities may be used to engage the emotions of the participants.



Further Reading

Individually Guided Ignatian Retreats

A simple and easy-to-read description of how it feels to do the Exercises. Send a sae to the National Retreat Association, Central Hall, 256 Bermondsey Street, London, SE1 3UJ. Tel: 0171-357 7736.

Vision National Retreat Association

An annual magazine about retreats which includes the programme of events at most retreat houses in the country. Phone the NRA for the price - see above.

Prayer for our Time Marion Morgan

An excellent booklet giving a general introduction to Ignatian prayer. £1.00 plus 6" x 8" sae from the author: 4b Dover Place, Bristol BS8 IAL.

God of Surprises Gerard W Hughes sj

A modern classic with prayer exercises. Highly recommended. DLT.

Sadhana: A Way to God

Anthony de Mello sj

The classic on awareness exercises, fantasy prayer etc. Doubleday Image.

Eyes to See, Ears to Hear

David Lonsdale sj

Comprehensive and readable introduction to Ignatian spirituality. Don't be put off by the dull cover! DLT.

Opening to God Thomas H Greene sj

Good introduction to Ignatian prayer. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame.

When the Well Runs Dry

Thomas H Greene sj

Useful when prayer is difficult. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame.

Weeds Among the Wheat

Thomas H Greene sj

On discernment and making choices. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame.

Finding God in All Things

Margaret Hebblethwaite

A very readable book on Ignatian prayer. Collins

***Finding God in All Things -
a Companion to the Spiritual Exercises***

William A Barry sj

A brilliant and easy to read introduction to the graces of the Exercises. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame.

Ignatian Spirituality & CLC Formation

Patrick O'Sullivan SJ

Try this after you have done the Exercises in some form. from the CLC office, 114 Mount Street, London, W1K 3AH.

***A Contemporary Reading of the
Spiritual Exercises***

David Fleming SJ

The book of the Exercises is a handbook for Spiritual Guides and is *not* meant for general reading. However, if you feel you need to refer to it, try this contemporary reading. From Christian bookshops