



Seeing with New Eyes

The Group as the source of Spirit-filled Ministry



Our Second Sign Conference at High Leigh was facilitated by Una Buckley – Lindsey Goodhew – Kathleen McGhee SND – Gero McLoughlin SJ

Our SIGN Conference 'Seeing with New Eyes' came at an exciting time for the network as our members begin to network more locally in the times between the Spring and Autumn gatherings. Our conference theme sought to support and enable these groups to flourish and grow.

Our speakers, from their different perspectives helped us to focus on some of the important aspects of working together in groups. With their experience and expertise we explored 'tried and tested' ways along with new insights. We networked and explored with one another, making connections and challenges with time for personal and group reflection to deepen and sustain the life of the Network

Thirty of our members attended enabling us to have an intimate conference, making it more possible to speak with one another and, when appropriate to act as one group. Our prayer room, book shop and meeting room were grouped next to each other and became the centre of our world while we were there. The Conference prayer time had been carefully put together by Eugenia, (Chair of SIGN), Sheilagh Kerr and Peter Ashman, Core Group members. It was presented on Powerpoint by Peter, vistas of sea, skies and sunsets accompanied by music and readings will stay in our minds as an ever-present reminder of our Creator God.

What does Ignatian Spirituality have to offer young people?



Una Buckley, our first speaker, is the president of Christian Life Community in England and Wales. Una has been particularly involved in the growth and formation of Young Adult CLC Groups. Una was a dynamic and engaging speaker who told us that CLC is a lay Ignatian movement with groups in 64 countries. There are 350 members in this country, including 60 young adults.

Many young adults felt 'they did not recognise themselves at their local church,' but encountering CLC found that God was interested in the details of their lives, that they were listened to as never before, and that there was a language of talking about God.

The three hallmarks of CLC are:

1. **Community** - a place to meet and a place where one can belong
2. **Spirituality** - time set aside for prayer, time for silence, time to be listened to, help with looking inside yourself to see where you are in relation to the world.
3. **Mission** - teaching us a way of making choices, being aware of the movement outward while asking where God is calling us in our daily life. The idea of mission can become our desire - what is the 'magis', the 'more' we can do for God.

Each group is no larger than 6 people with regular meetings and a group guide who also will help with transition and change as the membership of a group might change from time to time. A guide goes through a formation process. One of the challenges of belonging to a CLC group is the idea of commitment. People need to attend regularly for a group to grow in prayerfulness and trust. Commitment can be hard for some people, but for others is a lifeline. (For more info. www.clc-ew.org.uk)





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'A not insignificant harvest' – Co-operation in Ignatian Ministries



Gero McLoughlin SJ gave the first talk of the following day. Gero attends the Core Group of SIGN as the Jesuit representative. While living in the Jesuit community in Edinburgh, he is the Jesuit Province Promoter of Ignatian spirituality, helping people across Britain develop their ministries in this field. He gave us a provocative lecture, intended to stimulate discussion at the forum on the future of SIGN.

Addressing first the importance of history for shaping our responses in the present, Gero went on to talk about Ignatian ministries and history. The facts of its origin and growth are important; but wisdom, prayer and discernment also shape the history. Like the early Jesuits, we have to realise that we cannot do everything, that we cannot always get it right, and we can only try our best. The early Jesuits realised they could not reform society and lead people to God all on their own.

There are early examples of effective Ignatian groups, such as that which ran a shelter in Rome to help poor women reform their lives and thus offer them a better choice of life. The members realised that encouraging listening, observing and attending to needs was a way of following Christ. These 'guilds' were rooted in a deep personal devotion to Christ. That the groups carried out ministries as the group – and not just as an aggregate of individuals – seems to have been one of the factors that made them effective. Indeed, Gero added, an Ignatian group without a shared ministry carried out as the group, a shared ministry by which the group is identified would be close to a contradiction in terms.

We were then invited to reflect on what ministry SIGN, as a group, might offer to others in the service of Christ. How might we set about it?

Since the mid-1960s, but more evidently since 1995, the Society of Jesus has sought collaboration with the laity, and indeed this collaboration has transformed the Society's understanding of its mission. In 2008 Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the Jesuits gathered in Rome for its 35th General Congregation, remarked that the Church depends on Jesuits to reach the places and dimensions of human life that it is difficult for others in the Church to reach. In very large part, Jesuits can only do this with the collaboration and support of others, notably laity.

Praying together in the company of Ignatius



Our third speaker was the Revd. Lindsey Goodhew, an Anglican priest from St. Nicholas Church in Durham who has wide experience of retreats, quiet days and working with small groups. She has also developed some new material for Retreats in Daily Life, based on Open Door Retreat format. This she has generously made available online. Lindsey began by asking us to think back to prayer groups to which we had belonged.

The Bible encourages us to pray together. Ps. 35 says 'I will give you thanks in the Great Assembly'. We are told that Jesus went to the Synagogue with others, and in Acts that 'they devoted themselves to prayer'. The Christian tradition is one of people meeting together in large gatherings in fellowship, and this is our duty and our joy.

Meeting in small groups builds up our fellowship in Christ, bears witness to and nurtures our unity



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in Christ, it encourages us and bears witness to the Gospel. It can also nudge people to experience silent prayer. Prayer unites us in ways that debate cannot. We sit together round God's throne and we discover we are not alone. We begin to share our vulnerability.

What helps a group to become a place where change can happen?

1. **Focus on Christ and the scriptures.** Art, music, pictures, poetry etc all can help people, but Christ and scripture must be central. Have a structured time for silent prayer.
2. **Nurture reflective living.** Embrace all of life in prayer, and each person needs to take responsibility for leading a reflective life.
3. **Share reflection.** Allow opportunities to share experiences during prayer. Without this we miss out on what happens when we pray. When prayer is rich or prayer is dry, it helps if we articulate what is going on. Share without any comment from others, as this gives freedom.
4. **Commitment.** Sharing needs trust to build up, which only comes if members are committed.
5. **Thoughtful and careful preparation** needs to be given, and a willingness to draw on the wisdom of others. People like order and structure, a framework in which to feel safe.

After dinner we had an open forum. There were many comments about members' hopes and desires for SIGN. There seems to be a need for more communication between members and between the Core Group and members. The Core Group have tried to generate Local SIGN Quiet Days in the various regions, but these had been poorly attended on the whole. There seems to be a desire for local groups, but these need to be convened. It was pointed out that the Core Group are mostly older people and it is clear that we need more active younger members. It is now seen that the use of Facebook and Twitter and the internet generally is becoming more and more essential in modern life. The Core Group left the forum wondering what might lie in the future for SIGN.

'It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves' - discerning in groups



Our final speaker was Sr. Kathleen McGhee SND, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, who has been a member of the St. Beuno's team, and has much experience working with groups in discernment.

The nature of this subject meant that we needed to experience in the present what we were hearing and feeling sitting in our group of 30 people. Kathleen began by asking us how we were, from consolation to desolation, on a scale of 1 to 10. We then each gave one word to express our feelings at that moment. She then asked us to reflect on what gift each of us might bring to the group. St. Francis de Sales had used the phrase 'heart to heart', and we then broke into pairs, with someone we did not know, to talk heart to heart for a few minutes, sharing what we would like them to know.

Through all this we had been given the chance of being in touch with ourselves, and we needed to be able to listen to our own heart. Discernment is about being in touch with God, with other people



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and being attentive to who we are.

The identity of the group is important. Jesus asked ‘who do you say that I am?’

In groups of 4 we were asked to say individually ‘who do you think SIGN is?’ After listening and talking we then had to say ‘who do we think SIGN is now’.

As a discerning group we needed to discover what is our question. How do we find the right question for SIGN? What is the question that is forming this group? Wisdom 6 says ‘Set your heart therefore on what I have to say: listen with your will and you will be instructed’ (ie you will be enlightened).

We reflected on this and were asked ‘Where are we now?’ Some of the responses were:

1. **How do we go outward?** How to we regenerate, find new life? Is there an apostolic call for SIGN?
2. **How do we bring together the apostolic and the group?** Can we let the anxiety go? What is the mission for SIGN?
3. **What we say as a group reflects our personal movement of spirits.** If you believe in the wisdom of the group, then 6 or 8 people chosen at random can represent a large group. What is necessary is listening, reflection, prayer, letting scripture shine.
4. **How do we become a discerning group** that makes our hearts burn within us?
5. **Attract people** to the group.
6. **Create cell groups**
7. **Be happy with small steps.**

We left the conference feeling challenged about our future, but very excited about what we had heard. Each of our 4 speakers had demonstrated clearly the need for working with and belonging to small groups. Our task is to enable that to happen.

There was much gratitude expressed, and at our closing liturgy we each received a wooden cross and a book mark made by Iona Rainer and her husband, a tangible expression of what we had received.

The Conference was arranged by the **SIGN Core Group** to which the whole network owe enormous thanks.



The Southern Ignatian Network (SIGN) is constituted by Deed of Trust and is a registered Charity No. 1055559. SIGN's address is: The Secretary of SIGN, 4 Oval Road, London NW1 7EB. The Charity's objects are the advancement of the Christian Religion in particular by the promotion and encouragement of the Ignatian tradition.

2010—2011 SIGN Core Group

Elected at the 2010 AGM in March

Chair Sr. Eugenia Geraghty

Secretary Christine Risebero

Vice Chair Margaret Palladino

Treasurer Laurence Benkhabez

Jesuit representative

Gero McLoughlin sj

Membership Secretary

Margaret Palladino

Other Members

Peter Ashman

Sr. Mary Forrest

Sheilah Kerr

Nicole Paice

Iona Rainer

Sue Wilson

A Core Group has existed since the beginning of SigN in 1996 in one form or another. It meets twice a year, in February and September. In between times, members serve on small sub-groups to prepare Gatherings, produce the newsletter, consider matters relating to the membership, and to monitor financial matters.



SIGN SECRETARY

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