



The simple  
leather  
shoes of  
St. Ignatius  
of Loyola.

# Exploring an Institution's Roots:

## Board Members Walk in a Saint's Footsteps

BY REV. PHILIP L. BOROUGHS, S.J.

WHEN MANY OF US IN HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY HEAR THE term “pilgrimage,” we may immediately think of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*; or the increasingly popular Camino de Santiago popularized in Emilio Estevez’ 2010 movie, *The Way*; or the annual Muslim ritual of the Hajj, a religious journey to Mecca. The United Nations recently estimated that 330 million people—one in three tourists worldwide—is on a pilgrimage. At Jesuit institutions in the United States and other parts of the world, a new form of pilgrimage has emerged with a focus not only on a sense of place, but also on the values and traditions that help define the work we do.



Cobblestones  
in Rome, one  
of the stops on  
the Ignatian  
pilgrimage.





With increasing frequency, students, faculty, administrators, and other senior leaders are making the journey to northern Spain to visit the sites where St. Ignatius Loyola was born in 1491 and experienced his transformative religious conversion, and then on to Rome where he and his early companions founded the Society of Jesus, popularly known as the Jesuits. The hope is that today's pilgrims will gain new insight into how, in the spirit of St. Ignatius, the Jesuit spiritual tradition animates—and Jesuit academic institutions embody—a mission that links the intellectual life with a passion for meaning, justice, and service.

It was in this spirit that I invited and led a group of 28 past and present board members, their spouses, and senior leaders of the College of the Holy Cross on such a pilgrimage this past summer. In many ways, the goal of this eight-day journey was similar to one that Holy Cross faculty and staff members have been setting for 10 years: namely, an increased understanding of St. Ignatius and the origins of the Jesuits and an opportunity to reflect on contemporary implications of the spiritual questions that drove his life. With our trustees, I also hoped to see a heightened sense of bonding in our shared work for the college—especially as we embark on major institutional initiatives, including a

comprehensive campaign and ambitious building projects.

Months before making the trip, our vice president for mission gave the “pilgrims” readings to contextualize our travels, and each morning while on the trip, he provided a handout describing the significance of the sites we would be seeing, a scriptural reading related to the focus of the day, and reflection questions that helped us connect St. Ignatius’ experiences with our own. Over the course of our travels, we attended Mass in five historic chapels; met with local Jesuits and other experts to learn firsthand about the history and ongoing work of the Society; spent time in prayer, reflection, and focused dis-





## Living and Sharing the Mission: A Trustee's Journey

I wasn't quite sure what to expect on a trip that focused on the historical life and spiritual legacy of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. As an accounting major in the late 1970s, the history of the Jesuits wasn't a part of my Holy Cross experience. The values of a Jesuit education—a commitment to service, respect for varying viewpoints, and an insistence on investigating ideas—is something I've never doubted, but the historical and spiritual beginnings were less familiar.

The pilgrimage allowed for a rare event to occur: A busy group of people, with diverse interests and backgrounds, came together, unplugged, and learned. Physical distance from life's daily distractions allowed us to build stronger, more informed, more honest relationships. Many board meetings are spent discussing the pressing business of the college. During the trip, we saw where St. Ignatius tackled important decisions in his life, while sharing stories of our own families, interests, and careers. Those conversations were just as important as the time spent at historical sites and beautiful churches.

Ultimately, the trip renewed our commitment to advance Holy Cross by ensuring that the college is accessible to future generations and supports the values of a Jesuit education. The pilgrimage illuminated the fact that Holy Cross is more than an exceptional college on a hill. Through its alumni, students, faculty, and the Jesuits themselves, Holy Cross becomes a living testament to the values of faith and service embodied by St. Ignatius. As trustees, we also have a commitment to support the living mission of the college by using our education to benefit others.

My pilgrimage experience made me proud of the places, values, and traditions—compassion, discipline, service—that are the cornerstone of a Jesuit education. Even more valuable was the opportunity to share this experience with my fellow trustees.

—Kathleen McLaughlin LaCroix, Holy Cross alumna and board member

cussion; and shared wonderful meals each evening where the conversations lasted well into the night.

At the historic places we visited in Spain and Rome, as we gained a deeper understanding of St. Ignatius' interior movements, our own interior lives were simultaneously engaged. Listening to our pilgrims on the bus, at dinner, and following well-prepared liturgies, it was clear that a deeper sense of our founding history, thoughtful spiritual growth, and a palpable experience of bonding were taking hold as the days unfolded. ■

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**1** Our first full day was spent at the Loyola family castle and sanctuary in the Basque region of Spain. There, we celebrated Mass in the room where Ignatius slowly recovered from wounds received in the battle at Pamplona in 1521. In this sacred place, his spiritual transformation—from wealthy, callow soldier and gambler to the humble, spiritually seeking man who founded a religious order and a tradition of global higher education that continues today—began.



**2** Next, we traveled to the village of Javier and the castle home of St. Francis Xavier, roommate to St. Ignatius at the University of Paris and one of the founders of the Society of Jesus. We later celebrated Mass in the nearby parish church where St. Francis Xavier was baptized.



**3** On the long bus trip to the Benedictine Monastery of Montserrat and the nearby town of Manresa, where St. Ignatius had a powerful vision of God and drafted the Spiritual Exercises (the 30-day retreat experience of meditation, prayer, and contemplative practices), we learned the Ignatian prayer called the Examen—prayerful reflection on the day's events.

**4** We traveled then to Montserrat, an extraordinarily beautiful mountain monastery where, in 1522, St. Ignatius renounced his former way of life, leaving his sword and knife on the altar of Our Lady of Montserrat and giving his clothes to a poor man, dressing instead in rough sandals and a staff. He began his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, then returned to Europe to begin his formal education so as to serve God's people more effectively.







## Sustaining the Understanding of Mission: The Chair's View

From students to faculty to senior leadership, the College of the Holy Cross has a very clear sense of its mission. One of the most important parts of my role as trustee is to sustain the understanding of mission. This can be very challenging, since the number of Jesuits at the college and throughout the world continues to decline.

I joined the pilgrimage for two reasons: to better understand the Ignatian tradition and to help me as a trustee play a role in how the mission impacts the strategy and operations of the college.

When our group met in Bilbao, Spain, to begin our journey, we wondered what this experience would be like. Many of us don't wear our religious identity on our sleeves, but we were all open to seeing where the pilgrimage would take us. Every morning as we reviewed our itinerary, read the history about what we would see that day, and engaged in prayer, we became a little more cohesive as a group and better understood the awakening that Ignatius himself experienced. Thinking about this wounded soldier discovering God in all that he encountered and how it led him to devote his life to God became real in a way that can only occur when you are present.

The role of our fellow Jesuit pilgrims made us consider how we, as trustees, will partner with them to sustain the college's mission. Their traditional role as scholars and educators added richness to the pilgrimage, but their role as pastoral priests made the trip. The unexpected highlight of each day was Mass. Each of our Jesuit companions took a turn presiding and brought his own experience and personality to the task. The partnership formed through these powerful liturgical experiences each day created an even stronger commitment to the college's Jesuit mission, and all of us came home ready to follow through on that.

Holy Cross provides a distinct undergraduate liberal-arts experience, and its Jesuit identity is a critical element. My personal commitment to sustaining that experience is far better informed as a result of making the pilgrimage. All colleges can benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of what sets them apart. Learning the history of our college's mission will enable us as trustees to sustain it amidst all of the challenges we face today in higher education.

—John Mahoney, chair of the Holy Cross board of trustees

**5** Still following in Ignatius' footsteps, we travelled through Barcelona and on to Rome. There, we visited the early sites of the nascent Society of Jesus, including the restored residential rooms of St. Ignatius, the Church of the Gesu (the Jesuit mother church, built in the late 16th century), and the "curia" or headquarters of the Society of Jesus near the Vatican. There, a prominent Jesuit from India spoke of the global apostolic goals of the Jesuits, which include service to faith and to the justice that faith demands.

**6** While in Rome, we toured the Scavi (excavations of ancient burial grounds far below the main floor of St. Peter's), and the next day celebrated our closing Mass in the Lithuanian Chapel. Later that morning, we gathered with thousands of others in St. Peter's Square for Pope Francis' noontime prayer (called the Angelus) and reflections. The first Jesuit Pope spoke movingly of the need to live our faith with joy while engaging the challenges facing our world today. These themes were newly clear to our Jesuit trustees, now animated by a pilgrimage that, in remarkable ways, opened us up to our mission and institutional future.