

THE ROLE OF AN IGNATIAN EDUCATOR IN A JESUIT SCHOOL

Staff of St. Aloysius

May 10th

Dear Dr Bonello, Fr Jimmy and the Council of Heads, members of the senior leadership teams,

Dear members of staff of St Aloysius College,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your warm welcome at St Aloysius College, a renowned Jesuit educational institution in Malta. Founded upon the noble principles of Ignatian spirituality and human and academic excellence, St Aloysius College stands as a beacon of enlightenment and service in our community. Since its foundation, this esteemed institution has been synonymous with holistic education, fostering the intellectual, spiritual, and personal growth of generations of students.

As we come together today, I wish to express my deep gratitude for the privilege to address such a dedicated group of educators and collaborators within the Ignatian tradition. Our gathering here at St Aloysius College in Malta is a testament to our shared commitment to excellence, service, and the pursuit of the Magis.

I would like to thank you for all your efforts and generosity, particularly to reach out to students of all abilities, for the change processes that you are undertaking through the implementation of your strategic plan, and to being more learner-centred in your approaches to quality teaching and learning. Thank you for your determination to sustain and strengthen your identity as a Jesuit College.

I would like to share with you some reflections on the role of an Ignatian educator in a Jesuit school.

Magnanimity

The first thing that comes to my mind is Pope Francis' meeting with the educational communities of the schools in Italy and Albania. During his audience on June 7th, 2013, Pope Francis referred to one of the most important elements of a Jesuit school: to learn to be magnanimous.

"Magnanimity: this virtue of the great and the small (*Non coerceri maximo contineri minimo, divinum est*), which always makes us look at the horizon. What does being magnanimous mean? It means having a great heart, having greatness of mind; it means having great ideals, the wish to do great things to respond to what God asks of us. Hence also, for this very reason, to do well the routine things of every day and all the daily actions, tasks, meetings with people; doing the little everyday things with a great heart open to God and to others. It is therefore important to cultivate human formation with a view to magnanimity."

In whatever we do at our schools, we always have to keep this focus: to educate our students how to become magnanimous.

More than ever before, schools are becoming instrumental in the human and spiritual development of children and young people. This is particularly so especially because of the increase in family breakups and mental health issues. Your role as educational leaders and educators is becoming more central to the mission of the Church in Malta.

Your mission is to accompany children and young people to understand the world we live in, and to help younger generations find their place in the world, and before God, so that they can contribute to building a better world.

Facilitators of faith journeys

One of the most important roles you have as an Ignatian educator is to accompany children and young people during their faith journey. Being a Catholic school means that we must give priority to the work of faith formation. The school can be one of the privileged places for our students to have a deep and personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The school chaplaincies are providing various opportunities for all students and members of staff to grow in their faith. I congratulate you for your efforts to invest human and financial resources in strengthening your chaplaincy teams and Ignatian formation programmes for all members of staff.

As we speak about accompanying students and young people during, let us pause for a moment and think of ourselves, too. We need to be accompanied, too; we need enrichment, and we need to take care of our relationship and conversation with God. God is like a patient teacher, accompanying us constantly as we grow in this relationship and conversation with Him. The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius help us pay close attention to the way God works in our personal and daily life, in modern life's challenges, and in our mission. I invite you to experience the spiritual gifts offered to us by the Spiritual Exercises.

While respecting students and members of staff who embrace different religions and denominations, or who are indifferent to faith, a Jesuit school needs to have a clear Catholic identity. By this, we mean that it is a school with a clear and preferential option for the Catholic tradition, a school that keeps re-evaluating itself in what it means to be Catholic, amid a plurality of other options. It is a preference that respects and promotes dialogue with other religions and denominations.

Your initiatives to teach students and members of staff how to practise the Ignatian Examen is central. Through this exercise, we become more aware of the Lord's work in us and through us, and learn how to make decisions from a faith perspective. This is perhaps one of the most precious gifts you can embrace and give to your students.

Encountering the divine in the classroom

The encounter with the divine is not exclusive to the sacraments, retreats, and moments of prayer. In the manual of the Spiritual Exercises, St Ignatius advises the retreat director to let the relationship between God and the retreatant take centre stage. For Ignatius, there is always a three-way relationship in every spiritual retreat: the relationship between the retreat director and the retreatant, between the retreat director and God, and most importantly, between the retreatant and God.

The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) maintains the importance and integrity of the interrelationship of teacher, learner and subject matter, always within the context in which

they live. Imagine a classroom where the principles of the IPP are not just theoretical concepts but guiding lights illuminating the path of learning. As educators, we hold immense power to shape the hearts and minds of our students. By embracing the IPP, we can truly make a profound difference in our students' lives. The way you design and conduct your lessons can enable experiences that lead to reflection and action.

In teaching subjects like History, Literature, Mathematics and Science, to mention just a few of the many subjects offered in this College, we have a unique opportunity to infuse our lessons with the transformative spirit of Ignatian education. Rather than simply conveying information and content, let us strive to create dynamic learning environments where learners are not passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants in their own intellectual and spiritual growth.

In History and Literature classes, let us invite students to delve into the complexities of human experience, and wrestle with questions of identity, justice, and moral responsibility rather than merely recounting facts, dates, events and themes. Through the study of historical narratives and literary texts, students can develop critical thinking skills, empathy, and understand diverse perspectives, challenging them to discern the underlying values and beliefs that shape society. By integrating the principles of reflection, discernment, and action into our teaching practices, we empower students to excel academically, and even become compassionate and socially responsible leaders in their communities. The impact of an Ignatian educator extends far beyond the classroom walls, shaping the future trajectory of our students' lives and influencing the world for the better.

In Mathematics, for example, we can invite students to explore the beauty and wonder of mathematical concepts through inquiry-based learning instead of focusing solely on rote memorization and routine problem-solving techniques. By posing open-ended questions and encouraging students to grapple with real-world applications, we foster a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of mathematical principles with the world around us.

Similarly, in Science, let us move beyond the confines of the textbook and engage students in hands-on experiments and investigations that spark curiosity and wonder. By emphasizing the Ignatian value of finding God in all things, we can instill in our students a sense of awe and reverence for the natural world, inspiring them to become stewards of creation and advocates for environmental justice.

As educators, let us rise to the challenge of being Ignatian educators, guided by the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm in all that we do. Let us be catalysts for transformation, inspiring our students to ignite their desires, cultivate their talents, and embark on a lifelong journey of learning and growth. Together, let us unleash the full potential of Ignatian education to create a brighter, more just, and more compassionate world for generations to come.

Preparing global citizens

Another important role of an Ignatian educator is to prepare competent, compassionate, conscientious, and committed global citizens.

Global citizenship, as practised in a Jesuit school, embodies several key characteristics that reflect the Ignatian values of solidarity, service, and justice. Global citizenship in a Jesuit school fosters an appreciation for diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. Students are encouraged to engage with people from different backgrounds, respecting and valuing their unique perspectives and experiences. Global citizenship in a Jesuit school promotes interfaith dialogue and understanding. Students explore and appreciate the religious and spiritual diversity of the world, while deepening their own faith and spirituality within the Ignatian tradition.

Jesuit education emphasizes the promotion of evangelical justice and advocacy for the rights and dignity of all individuals, especially the marginalized and vulnerable. Students are empowered to address systemic injustices and work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society. I commend St Aloysius College for its exemplary inclusive practices, which make it a unique Jesuit educational institution in Europe that provides formation to a relatively high percentage of students with learning difficulties. By embracing and celebrating diversity, and creating a welcoming environment for all, you embody the spirit of Ignatian hospitality and extend God's love and mercy to all who enter your doors.

Global citizenship involves active engagement in service-learning initiatives that address local and global challenges. Through hands-on experiences, students develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of responsibility towards others, both within their communities and beyond. Your many Chaplaincy initiatives in the primary school, the 'People for Others Programme' in the secondary school, and the 'Social Responsibility Programme' at your Sixth Form, are all praiseworthy initiatives that promote such learning.

Another important aspect of global citizenship education is the importance of environmental sustainability and stewardship. Ignatian educators are encouraged to help students reflect on their role and responsibility as they care about the Earth, and take action to protect the environment for the current and future generations.

Moreover, I would like to invite you to foster among students, a global citizen mindset, a deeper understanding of global issues and interconnectedness. I encourage you to create discussions with students where together you critically examine complex global issues such as poverty, inequality, peace, artificial intelligence, and climate change. This will help develop informed perspectives through dialogue and inquiry. Through critical thinking and reflection, students develop a deeper understanding of themselves, and of their role in creating positive change in today's world.

By embodying these characteristics of global citizenship, students in Jesuit schools are equipped with the competent skills necessary to become compassionate and socially responsible leaders who actively contribute towards the common good, both locally and globally. Jesuit education emphasizes the development of ethical leadership skills deeply rooted in Ignatian values. Students are encouraged to lead with integrity, empathy, and a commitment to serving others.

Collaborators of the one mission of the Society of Jesus

Jesuit-lay collaboration is another important dimension of the role of an Ignatian educator. We Jesuits, together with all of you, are called to be collaborators in the one mission of the Society of Jesus today.

Serious Ignatian formation of both lay people and Jesuits is key to maintaining the Ignatian identity of St Aloysius College. Though Jesuits and lay people have a different vocation, we all share in the same baptism. Jesuits are called to live a vowed life through their presence and ministry at school, whether they are serving in administrative or pastoral roles. I would like to invite you, all lay people employed at St Aloysius College, to live your vocation as co-workers in the one mission of reconciliation and justice. I encourage you to be fully involved in sharing your faith, talents and expertise, and to own this vision and mission of the College by actively taking part in the formation programmes the College offers to all of you. The Spiritual Exercises are a special experience of grace worth considering.

I would like to encourage members of the leadership teams to continue to be involved in the discernment processes leading to identifying the priorities for the College, as was the case in the process leading to your strategic plan. I also ask members of staff who are non-Catholic or non-Christian to offer your talents in building the educational community at St Aloysius College, and to be respectful of the apostolic nature of this educational institution.

Let us reflect on the profound importance of living in a synodal way. This is a principle that lies at the heart of the teachings of Pope Francis, and resonates deeply with our Jesuit tradition: "Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium". Our schools are ideal places where synodality is lived through collaboration, distributive leadership, discernment processes, recognition and respect for the diversity of vocations, potential and talents of all members of staff.

Pope Francis often reminds us that the Church is not a monolithic institution, but rather a living organism, where each member, from the highest ranks to the grassroots level, has a voice and a role to play. Embracing this synodal approach requires us to listen attentively to one another, to engage in genuine dialogue, and to discern together the ways in which we can better serve our community. Concrete examples of this synodal way can be seen in our collaborative decision-making processes, where the voices of all stakeholders, including students, parents, and staff, are valued and taken into account. It is reflected in our efforts to adapt our educational methods to meet the evolving needs of our students, ensuring that we remain responsive and relevant in an ever-changing world. Let us continue to embrace this synodal way of being, as we journey together in the pursuit of truth, justice, and the greater glory of God.

As we strive to uphold the ten indicators of Jesuit education and integrate the four Cs: competence, compassion, conscience, and commitment - in all aspects of College life, let us do so with unwavering zeal and dedication. Let us continue to be men and women for others, igniting the flames of compassion and justice in the hearts of our students, and empowering them to become agents of positive change in our world.

In conclusion, I invite each of you to recommit yourselves to the noble mission entrusted to us as Ignatian educators. Let us draw inspiration from the rich tradition of St Ignatius of Loyola, and the countless men and women who have gone before us, blazing trails of light and love in the darkest corners of our world. Together, let us journey onward with faith,

hope, and courage, knowing that our labour is not in vain, and that God's grace sustains us in every moment.

Thank you! May the spirit of St Ignatius continue to guide and inspire us in all that we do.
Ad maiorem Dei gloriam!