



A Community of Hope:

ISP in Dublin

Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality in Dublin, Ireland

Photo: Br. Jeffrey Ploquinto, SJ

By Fr. Eddie Cosgrove, SJ

The Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP) offers programs designed for men and women in substance use recovery who have a desire to deepen their spirituality and are open to sharing their story and listening to others. Though founded in the Jesuit tradition, the project does not proselytize, and people of all (or no) faith traditions are welcome.

“Last night I had a pleasant dream I woke up with a smile.”

The lyrics were on the screen, and there was no going back now. I launched into the song, my first time singing solo in public since I was a child at family gatherings. The band played a tune similar to the song...and I made it through the first verse, “Sure it was my lovely Leitrim where the Shannon waters flow.”

I was feeling some trepidation walking into a Dublin hostel for the homeless for the first time, where I had arranged to meet the house manager to talk about the Ignatian Spirituality Project (ISP). We chatted as he showed me around, I met some of the staff, and I talked with one of the men who was very interested in coming on a retreat. However, most of the men were attending a Men’s Shed

gathering in another part of the hostel, and I was invited to drop in.

Next thing I know I’m in the middle of a karaoke performance with a live band playing the music and the lyrics on a large screen. “You might sing a song, Fr. Eddie,” said the house manager in passing as we walked toward the gathering. This was one of those situations that I dreaded, being expected to do a party piece under pressure from others. As people sang songs, drank tea, and chatted, I realized that this was a chance for the guys to get to know me in a different way, an opportunity to be part of a community—something which was part and parcel of the way the Ignatian Spirituality Project works. So with God’s help, I stepped out of my comfort zone and away I went, singing a song about my home county.

I did ok; nobody walked out! I think I gave a number of other men the courage to sing. (I didn’t set the bar too high!) It turned out to be a great thing to do, to share with others a bit of *craic* (Gaelic for “fun”), and I enjoyed getting to know people in this way. A number of men signed up for our first retreat, and we have had good relations with the hostel since.

This story reflects some of the nature of an ISP retreat. We step out of our comfort zones and gather as equals, facilitators and retreatants alike. We look at ourselves honestly, and as we share our stories, with all their lights and shadows, burdens are eased, light shines through, and a community of hope grows.

The Ignatian Spirituality Project has been a key discovery in my life, and it reflects where my heart lies in terms of

my ministry as a Jesuit priest. At my first retreat on a visit to St. Louis in December 2015 (I was studying theology in Toronto at the time), I felt God's presence and action powerfully during that retreat, helping me forward on my own journey of liberation, from the addictive thought patterns and behaviors that had a hold on me. Of course I was going to "help" those in recovery from homelessness and addiction, but it was through the community we all formed together that God's liberating action was present for all to share in and to help each other grow in freedom.

Following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, I was led to help start ISP in Toronto during my theology studies, with the dream of bringing it to Ireland. With the support of donors for new ISP cities, the efforts of the ISP head office in Chicago, and our volunteer team in Ireland, that dream has come true—our first ISP men's retreat took place in August 2019, and our first women's retreat in February 2020, at Manresa Jesuit Centre of Spirituality in Dublin. Since then we have had a follow-up retreat and regular ongoing in-person group spiritual accompaniment with the men's group.

The arrival of COVID-19 has been a huge change. Unfortunately, we have had to cancel a number of retreats. However, we moved our ongoing accompaniment men's group online, ran a follow-up retreat online for the women's group, and began ongoing online accompaniment. We also ran four all-team training workshops on the 12 Steps and Ignatian spirituality and have kept up contact with our two main temporary accommodation providers (so far virus-free). Our retreat center has adapted so that it can open for smaller groups (which suits ISP) in these times, and we hope to run a retreat in the next month or two when it is safe to do so.

Recently, I visited a friend of mine, Pat, who I met on our first retreat. He offered to tell his story, "if it could help the homeless in any way."

Here is some of Pat's story:
Addiction took everything from me, my livelihood and the love and respect of my family and friends. This culminated

meetings, and continuing to investigate the nature of my faith, my life has been transformed completely.

I am now over two years free from



in me becoming homeless. I entered a treatment program and upon completion moved on to emergency accommodations in 2018. Here I gained acceptance of the causes and consequences of my addiction. Despite being clean and sober for a number of years and starting to make some moves forward in my personal life, being homeless made me feel unwanted, unheard, and invisible in today's society. The Ignatian Spirituality Project gave me a safe and secure environment to discuss this with other men who were experiencing the same. Since engaging with ISP, I have grown closer to the members of this group and am able to share with them openly and honestly about how I feel, and in turn, I have become more considerate to all of those experiencing homelessness. The weekend retreat at Manresa gave me respite from hostel accommodations, and through group work, sharing, prayer, and meditation, I gained a renewed faith that God was still present in my life despite my present circumstances.

Since entering a treatment program, committing to going to regular 12-step

alcohol and drugs and have my own place to live. I began attending university in September with the backing of a scholarship, studying social work and social policy.

The people of ISP Dublin were the only ones who came in to see us, to offer us a place to go away for the weekend, and this meant so much to me. ✠

Dublin is the newest affiliate in the ISP Network. In 2018, an institutional affiliate relationship was formalized with the Jesuits in Ireland.

For more information, visit ISPRetreats.org/Dublin.



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