

BOSTON COLLEGE

CHERISHED
BELONGING

THE
HEALING
POWER OF
LOVE IN
DIVIDED
TIMES

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FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC CONVOCATION
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CONVERSATIONS AT BOSTON COLLEGE

As a Jesuit Catholic University, conversation is at the heart of the Boston College experience. From these Conversations in the First Year, to discussions in the classroom, to late-night confidences with roommates and friends, to discourse with on-campus speakers, to mentoring talks with faculty and staff members, to engagement with the Greater Boston community and with the global community through international programs – Boston College encourages students to ask big questions, to reflect, and to respond in the most loving way to the world around you.

*In the daily give and take of their social lives and in more dramatic experiences, young men and women grow into a coherent sense of identity, of comfort with themselves and with the other people in their lives and in the communities of which they are members. They learn to manage emotions, take responsibility for their actions, develop mature interpersonal relationships, work collaboratively, and enlarge—across racial, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries— their understanding of who is to be cared for and who is to be included in their community of concern. In a Jesuit university, especially, they are likely to be challenged to experience directly the lives of those marginalized in our social systems, to reflect on social and political structures and how they can inhibit or advance the just flourishing of individuals and communities, and to decide how they can use their own gifts and talents to advance the common good (from *The Journey Into Adulthood*, pp. 13-14).*

As you enter Boston College, you must consider how we live in the 21st century and how the world is growing rapidly and changing in unforeseen ways. In the midst of this globalized and technologically driven world, we ask you to critically evaluate all that has come

before us. To enter into the University core curriculum is to enter into a foundation of knowledge and experiences that will better equip each of you to synthesize and adapt to the ever-changing world that you are part of each day. Being able to read, write, and think critically will be important building blocks within your academic journey here at Boston College.

To fully embrace your Jesuit, Catholic education, you also need to consider how you will grow in your own understanding of faith. There are many conversation partners, including members of the Jesuit community, faculty, staff, and administrators, who are here to be your companions in contemplative action and reflective conversation as you search for truths in your life and the world around you.

*Implicit in this understanding of the relationship of teacher and student is the assumption that education is, fundamentally, a conversation. Suppose we build on this idea. The life of a college or university is in some ways a never-ending conversation—in classrooms, dorm rooms, dining halls, at parties, in faculty offices, scheduled meetings, casual encounters, and work settings. The topics may be an economic theory, the results of an experiment, the Big Questions that have engaged thinkers for ages, last week's statistics quiz, tomorrow night's party, the ups and downs of romantic relationships, political and social issues nationally and across the world, life after graduation, diets, family problems, and any number of other subjects. A student has multiple conversation partners: teachers, certainly, but also roommates, friends, coaches, campus ministers, academic advisors, counselors, work-study supervisors, parents and other family members. And some of the most important conversation partners may be the books they read, the thinkers they study, the works of art they experience, the organized bodies of knowledge they have to master, the cultural and religious and intellectual traditions they encounter, and the interpretive theories that are proposed to them (from *The Journey Into Adulthood*, pp. 17-19).*

WHY READ CHERISHED BELONGING: THE HEALING POWER OF LOVE IN DIVIDED TIMES?

Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J. is a Jesuit priest who received his M.Div. from Weston Jesuit School of Theology, now the Boston College Clough School of Theology and Ministry, in 1984. In 2021, Boyle was the recipient of the Clough School of Theology and Ministry Alumni Distinguished Service Award in recognition of the work he has done as a pastor and as founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and reentry program in the world. Father Boyle was invited to deliver the Clough School's Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Lecture that year, where it was noted in the introduction that:

From 1986 to 1992, Father Boyle served as pastor of Dolores Mission Church, then the poorest Catholic parish in Los Angeles that also had the highest concentration of gang activity in the city. Father Boyle witnessed the devastating impact of gang violence on his community during the so-called Decade of Death that began in the late 1980s and peaked at 1,000 gang related killings in 1992. In the face of law enforcement tactics and criminal justice policies of suppression and mass incarceration as the means to end gang violence, Father Boyle and parish and community members adopted what was a radical approach at the time: treat gang members as human beings. In 1988, they started what would eventually become Homeboy Industries, which employs and trains former gang members in a range of social enterprises, as well as provides critical services to thousands of men and women who walk through its doors every year, seeking a better life (Introduction, CSTM Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Lecture, "The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness," March 25, 2021).

In addition to *Cherished Belonging*, Boyle has three previously published books *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (2010), *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (2017), and *The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness* (2021).

In *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* Boyle introduces the central focus of this book at the outset of when he writes, “No Us and Them, just Us. This is, indeed, God’s dream come true,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 1). He continues, “This book hopes to address the existential moment in which we find our country (and world). It seeks to remind ourselves of what we deeply want and how that longing connects us to each other on a route sure to lead us to our destination. It encourages a search for wholeness and a collective patience with each other as we all engage in healing and mend our severed belonging,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 4).

As students beginning at Boston College in Fall 2025, each of you will have the opportunity to read *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times* and to welcome its author, Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J., to Boston College to discuss this work.

In describing the work of Homeboy Industries, Boyle says:

... Homeboy is both a solution and sign. It’s concrete help for men and women who want to re-imagine their lives, who have been saddled with the lethal absence of hope and have been unable to conjure up an image of what tomorrow might look like. So we want a solution, but we also want to announce a message. What if we were to invest in each other? What if our singular aim was to create a community of beloved belonging? What if we were to imagine a circle of compassion, and then imagine nobody standing outside that circle? What if we chose together in a community of kinship, to dismantle the barriers that exclude? (CSTM Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Lecture, “The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness,” March 25, 2021).

In *Cherished Belonging*, Boyle uses many examples from Homeboy Industries to imagine how we might bring about this “community of kinship”. He alludes to the title of the book when he writes, “Cherishing is love fully engaged. Cherishing is tenderness in action...Cherishing is love with its sleeves rolled up and its coat wide-open,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 102). He later returns to the message, saying, “You greet the world with warmheartedness, and people believe they are good...The positivity of our warm hearts moves us forward and advances us toward a community of cherished belonging,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 177).

As you read this book and have the chance to engage in the first of many conversations with classmates and professors, you will be invited to think about the longing to connect with others, the search for wholeness (for ourselves and for others), and finding cherished belonging at Boston College.



CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR

“We seek to help folks become, more and more, their truth in love by loving them, by choosing to brighten, and this builds loving societies. Systems change when people do. People change when they are cherished,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 149).

Since 2004, *Conversations in the First Year* has engaged members of the incoming class in an intellectual and reflective dialogue with a common text, embodying the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition at Boston College which calls us to examine our faith and experience in conversation with other thinkers in order to pursue the greater glory of God. This conversation among thoughtful

leaders that will begin for you with this common text will carry over to conversations with all members of the Boston College community during your next four years.

Boston College proposes an explicit and intentional approach to a broader vision of student formation, drawn from the understanding of what it means to be human that is at the heart of the Jesuit educational tradition. In this view, student formation has three interconnected dimensions—an intellectual dimension, a social dimension, and a spiritual dimension—and a student's growth along all three dimensions ideally moves toward integration. Fostering this integrative movement is the responsibility of all the adults in the university. Their roles give them different points of entry into students' lives, each of which is an opportunity to engage students in the kind of "expert conversation" that helps them pay attention to their experience, reflect on its meaning, and make good decisions in light of what they have learned. This conversation already happens in many places at Boston College. An explicit and intentional concept of formation will draw all the adults in the university community into a collective effort to build on what we are already doing well in order to facilitate the full human flourishing of all our students (The Journey Into Adulthood, p. 1).

This ongoing conversation is designed to "help folks become, more and more, their truth in love by loving them" and is a part of the University's commitment to finding God in all things. "Contemporary Jesuit schools maintain the original commitment to rigorous intellectual development, to personal, moral, and religious formation, and to the discernment of God's action in all aspects of the student's experience. The pursuit of the greater glory of God remains rooted in a worldview that God can be encountered in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together." (*The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: A Conversation at Boston College*).



A WAY TO APPROACH THE TEXT

As you enter Boston College, we will ask each of you to engage in conversation, to live together, and to share your life with one another. Your conversations will include this book and how to find connections at Boston College (and beyond). It is the University's hope that you will discover conversation partners during your time at Boston College who will help you develop a sense of kinship and belonging in the University community.

The early Jesuits struggled to describe what they called "our way of proceeding." Their distinctive spirituality can be seen as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on its meaning, and ends in deciding how to act. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: being attentive, being reflective, and being loving. It results in the kind of good decision-making that St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, called discernment. Discernment enables each of us to seek the greater good before us. Having this deep interior knowledge of the heart is to communicate with God and trust that the hand of God is at work fortifying and directing us in our lives. One of the many goals of a Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom discernment is a habit.

We can think of discernment as the lifelong process of exploring our experience, reflecting upon its meaning, and living in a way that translates this meaning into action that creates a harmonious community for us all. We can also think of this process as something that we focus on with special intensity at particular moments in our lives, for example, during the four years of college or when we have to make important decisions. When we discern, we want to do so freely and with a sense of what God is calling us to do.

Through the practice of discerning, we grow in our ability to imagine how we are going to live our lives and discover our vocations. The novelist and theologian Frederick Buechner describes vocation as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” When we arrive at this place of convergence, we understand the fit between who we are and what the world needs of us; St. Ignatius urges us to be unafraid to live with the consequences of this realization and to respond with generosity and magnanimity, because this is the way that we can love as God loves (A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education).

From the very beginning, the goal of Jesuit education has been to form men and women for others. To cultivate this formation, St. Ignatius and his companions translated their distinctive spirituality into an educational vision by describing it as a three-part process. It begins with paying attention to experience, moves to reflecting on the meaning of experience, and ends in deciding how to act moving forward. Jesuit education, then, can be described in terms of three key movements: **Be attentive, be reflective, be loving** (*A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education*).

These three movements are cyclical and we are called to continue to move from one to another first noticing the world around us, then reflecting on our circumstances, then responding in the most loving way possible to the world around us. Once we have put that love into action, we are called again to pay attention to the world changed by our loving action, and to reflect on our place in the changed world, and to respond again in the most loving way possible to the new needs of the world around us.

As part of their formation, St. Ignatius and his companions established guiding principles to cultivate a reflective practice among their students which is integrated with the way we live in the world. These same reflective principles of **contemplation and action** provide the framework for today’s Boston College experience.

This model is highlighted in the lessons Boyle notes from the poet Mary Oliver, who “concluded that she had learned these three things in her living: 1) Pay attention. 2) Be astonished. 3) Share your astonishment.” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 84).

Boyle reflects on a similar model of moving from contemplation to action – while stressing the importance of doing it together because of our interconnectedness – when he references the signs in the London Tube, “‘See it. Say it. Sort it.’ They explain further that if you see something, say something, and then ‘We will sort it out.’ This third step is helpful and perhaps a good corrective to our American version. It acknowledges that things NEED to be sorted out together,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 44).

As part of their formation, St. Ignatius and his early Jesuit companions were committed to living in the world. At that time most religious orders did not espouse this global view, yet the Society of Jesus believed it was critical to engage people where they were, to be present in the world, to go out to the margins. These same principles of living a life of service, care for the whole person, and accompaniment provide the framework for today’s Boston College experience.

“The aspiration at the heart of the Jesuit educational tradition, then, is that every student will be an active and engaged learner, conscious of growing intellectually, socially, and spiritually, and of being able to integrate these dimensions of growth with his or her unique personality, talents, and ambitions. By internalizing the dynamic of paying attention, reflecting, and making good decisions, students lay the foundation for an adulthood where the practice of discernment about their experience and their actions becomes a way of life,” (*The Journey Into Adulthood*, p. 21).



CURA PERSONALIS, CONNECTION, AND CONVERSATION

So, for Jesuit education, it is not enough to live authentically in the world. We have to participate in the transformation of the world (the Hebrew phrase tikkun olam conveys the same idea, of mending or repairing the world). For more than four hundred years, it has been said that Jesuit education educated “the whole person.” Today, we live with an increasingly global sense of what it means to be human. A person can’t be considered “whole” without an educated solidarity with other human beings in their hopes and fears and especially in their needs. We can’t pay attention to our experience and reflect on it without realizing how our own lives are connected with the dreams of all those with whom we share the journey of human existence, and therefore with the economic, political, and social realities that support or frustrate their dreams. This is why Jesuit education is so often said to produce “men and women for others” (A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education).

This notion of engaging with the whole person encourages us to see all dimensions of the other, rather than reducing our relationship to a series of compartmentalized transactions and to open ourselves to those we encounter. By recognizing that each person has their own story, hopes, dreams, and vulnerabilities – and being present to them – we create greater opportunity to understand them as whole persons in a greater context.

In October 2000, Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus at that time, spoke to representatives from Jesuit colleges and universities about their commitment to *cura personalis*, or education of the whole person.

For 450 years, Jesuit education has sought to educate “the whole person” intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually. But in the emerging global reality, with its great possibilities and deep contradictions, the whole person is different from the whole person of the Counter-Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, or the 20th century. Tomorrow’s “whole person” cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow’s whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity...

We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to “educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world.” Solidarity is learned through “contact” rather than through “concepts,” as the Holy Father [Pope John Paul II] said recently at an Italian university conference. When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.

Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed.

(The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education Address by Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Santa Clara University, October 6, 2000).

In his article “Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” Boston College faculty member Barton T. Geger, S.J., explains the value of this care for the whole person for our students:

In 1986, cura personalis received prominent exposure in a document entitled “The Characteristics of Jesuit Education,” published by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education. In a passage that reads as if it might have been drawn from Ledóchowski’s “Instruction,” we find: Teachers and administrators, both Jesuit and lay, are more than academic guides. They are involved in the lives of the

students, taking a personal interest in the intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual development of every student.... They are ready to listen to their cares and concerns about the meaning of life, to share their joys and sorrows, to help them with personal growth and interpersonal relationships.... They try to live in a way that offers an example to the students, and they are willing to share their own life experiences. "Cura personalis" (concern for the individual person) remains a basic characteristic of Jesuit education ("Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations," Barton T. Geger, S.J., Jesuit Higher Education 3(2): 6-20 (2014).

While Geger notes that St. Ignatius and the early Jesuits did not use the phrase *cura personalis*, the way they engaged the world in their ministry and teaching espoused an integrated approach to caring for the whole person.

The Jesuit value of caring for and educating the whole person fundamentally acknowledges the dignity of the human person, as Boyle writes, "The Irish say, 'You are the place I stand when my feet are sore.' Who we are, truly, is loving attention, and our practice keeps reminding us of that truth. Our practice is to open the mind, quiet the heart, and it doesn't cost nuthin'. You return for a dose when your feet are sore."

"They asked Thomas Merton, 'What do the monks do all day?' He answered: 'Fall down. Get up. Fall down. Get up.' This perfectly describes Homeboy Industries as well. At Homeboy, we foster a community that practices friendship, where love comes first, since that's where the power is. And love promotes well-being. It wants what God wants: wholeness for everyone. It keeps us honoring the dignity and nobility in each person," (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 100).

Boston College's Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences Dean Gregory A. Kalscheur, S.J., makes explicit the connection of dignity to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in an article titled, "Key Task for Catholic Higher Ed" as he writes, "The Catholic intellectual tradition is at work whenever questioning in any field is open to moving out of narrow disciplinary isolation and toward the horizon

of human dignity, the common good, and the wholeness and fullness of life that the Christian tradition calls God's reign," (*Inside Higher Ed*, November 8, 2011).

In the same article, Kalscheur goes on to say that asking questions together and engaging in conversation are important dynamics of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition:

"A university animated by the Catholic intellectual tradition embraces all who are dedicated to learning from one another, and remains open to contributions that may come in a range of ways. This persuasion challenges a Catholic university to engage all people, cultures, and traditions in authentic conversation – conversation undertaken in the belief that by talking across traditions we can grow in shared understanding that opens all parties to the possibility of changing their views," (*Inside Higher Ed*, November 8, 2011).

Care for the whole person and the recognition of dignity are also integrated into Ignatius' definition of conversation as "turning towards someone: to live with, keep company with and even to help oneself and the other person toward new experiences and new interpretations of them." The dignity of each one of us is called forth in many ways as part of the Boston College community, and there are many opportunities for students, administrators, faculty, and staff members to engage in conversation as each seeks to ask the big questions and be attentive to the world around us.



ATTENTION AND CONNECTION

“‘Each of us,’ Pope Francis says, ‘is fully a person when we are part of a people,’” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 149).

“We don’t just walk each other home to wholeness; we are home to each other,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 31).

“So we help each other, not to make better choices but to walk home to well-being and deeper growth in love. Cherishing leads us to this warm embrace of the journey to wholeness,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 50).

“When things stay separate and isolated, they stiffen into survival mode ... We all can embrace a narrative that sometimes reinforces the separate tribe. We live in the shelter of each other,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 99).

“Therein lies the sanctity of our interconnectedness: a functioning society that rests in a web of mutuality. We are always in search of a more powerful narrative of belonging,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 203).

Senior leader at Boston College, Jack Butler, S.J. spoke about the importance of interconnectedness at Boston College in a 2020 online series titled *The Show@6* which modeled the importance of conversation and explored critical issues through the lens of the common good. The June 5, 2020 episode focused on “Jesuit Accompaniment in Vulnerable Times” and the importance of conversation in the life of Boston College.

Butler spoke about the way faculty, staff, and students accompany one another on our journey at Boston College, “We’re meant to be relational. We’re meant to fall in love. We’re meant to have friends. We’re meant to have difficult conversations. We’re meant to figure out life together.”

Boyle echoes this emphasis on the integration of love in all aspects of our lives. “But if you show up every day just to stay anchored in the present moment and to delight in the people in front of you, and to be reached by people and to receive them, it’s eternally replenishing. You can’t wait to come back the next day. I learned this the hard way a long time ago, many years ago. And I learned that once love is your goal and your aim, then there’s no such thing as failure, and there’s no such thing as success. And your true self is to be located in loving, so you don’t care about return. You don’t care about tally sheets or success stories. You just love being loving,” (CSTM Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Lecture, “The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness,” March 25, 2021).

This attentiveness changes how we are called to respond to the needs of the world around us.

In his article, “To be just, one must see ‘justice’ as a verb”, published in the September 9, 2023 issue of *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, Kalscheur refers to former Superior General of the Society of Jesus Rev. Adolfo Nicolás, S.J.’s address to Jesuit educators in which he talked about connection and engagement with the world.

“In a 2010 address to Jesuit educators, Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., suggested a powerful connection between a particular way of seeing the world and the transformation of character that might lead to a life of doing justice. He explained that the depth of thought and creative imagination that should characterize Jesuit education involve ‘a profound engagement with the real, a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface’ of things,” Kalscheur writes.

“According to Nicolás, the starting point for discerning will always be what is real: ‘the world of the senses so vividly described in the Gospels themselves; a world of suffering and need, a broken world with many broken people in need of healing. We start there. We don’t run away from there.’ Through the imaginative pedagogy of Ignatian contemplation, we are urged to enter into the depths

of that reality. ‘Beyond what can be perceived most immediately, [Ignatius] leads [us] to see the hidden presence and action of God in what is seen, touched, smelt, felt. And that encounter with what is deepest changes [us.]’

When we pay attention to the world in the way that Nicolás describes, we are changed. With this depth of vision, we are able to recognize God already at work in our world, healing, reconciling and loving. The depth of thought and creative imagination... enable us to integrate intellectual rigor with reflection on experience and creative imagination so that we might choose to act — working alongside our laboring God in constructing a world that is more humane, more just, and more faith-filled” (*Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, September 9, 2023).

Boyle describes the commitment to attention that St. Ignatius developed, “On February 27, 1544, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, wrote this one word in his spiritual journal. He proceeds to use it a lot for the remaining twelve years of his life. Before he dies, he goes back and circles the word wherever it appears. Now, I know Spanish, but I had never heard this word before. *Acatamiento*.

It comes from a somewhat archaic word, *acatar*, which means to look at something with attention,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 110).

This attentiveness that St. Ignatius cultivated involved not only recognition, but also a way of engaging in the world.

Boyle writes, “I don’t say “Kingdom.” The King keeps me from saying that. I don’t say “Kin-dom” because it feels “dom.” I say “kinship” because it’s not a place but a stance. It’s not a position; it’s a disposition and a temperament. It is where we abide, an anchor. It’s *acatamiento*,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 173).

Boyle re-iterates that attention demands a response from us, that as Nicolás indicates, we must choose to act. “It’s like Saint Ignatius with *acatamiento*. We are not sent to the world to hide from it.

We aren't meant to hoard and protect some mystical moment of inner peace. We are called to the world, yes, 'to the streets,' with affectionate awe and warm hearts. It's about choosing, all over again, with every breath we take, to be in the world who God is: compassionate loving-kindness," (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 176).



SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Boyle reflects on the power of heartbreak to bring about conversion, quoting Sufi master, Hazrat Inayat Khan, "God breaks the heart again and again and again ... until it stays open," (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 163).

St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), experienced that kind of heartbreak when he was wounded in battle in May 1521 in Pamplona, Spain. His leg was shattered by a cannonball and he was forced to return home to recover from this injury. For a wounded soldier returning home from battle, this was a time of shame and isolation. Ignatius spent several months convalescing and during that time he read two books, one on the life of Christ and one on the lives of the saints. The stories he encountered in these books encouraged him to reflect on his own life – his relationship with others, his relationship with himself, his relationship with God. This "cannonball moment" that led Ignatius into this reflective experience changed his life and as a result, Ignatius changed the world.

Is there a moment in your life that changed your perspective? Have you had the time to reflect on what this moment has meant in your life? How has it changed you and how have you changed the world as a result?

...

Throughout the book, Boyle reminds us that there should be no “Us” and “Them”.

“We don’t make progress when we demonize. We should abandon that altogether, and in all circumstances refuse to do it..

We should likewise jettison the idea that there could be such a thing as good people and bad people,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 10).

How often do we, as Boyle notes, “Find the vulnerability and cheaply exploit it for an equally inexpensive laugh?” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 89)

Are there times when you have judged others or categorized them as good or bad because of their actions? How can you begin to reframe those judgments to see the wholeness? How can you embrace the woundedness of others to better understand them?

...

Boyle stresses the importance of kinship and connection in accompaniment:

“Well, you have to find, I always call it, your own particularity. Because my margins aren’t your margins. And so you have to find anybody who’s left out, and every community has people who have been denied access. This isn’t about assimilating people who are at the margins. This is about – you’re not inviting them to the center; you’re going to the margins. And the poet Wallace Stevens says, we live in the description of the place and not the place itself. And we’ve settled for the description of the place, and we need to hold out for the place itself, which is exquisite mutuality. Where there is no us and them, where you will obliterate the illusion that we are separate. And so you find a way, in your own town, in your own city, in your own community. If you can’t find it in your own community, you go outside of it. Where you find people who carry more than the rest because we really do want to live in the place itself, of kinship and connection.”

(CSTM Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. Lecture, "The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness," March 25, 2021)

Who are the people who are on the margins in today's world, who are left out? Who are the people in the margins in your own life? What does it mean to you to go to the margins to accompany them?

...

"... What transcends even understanding each other is believing in each other.... Beyond understanding is believing," (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 97).

Who are the people who have believed in you? Who has accompanied you on your journey? What impact has that had?

...

Boyle shares the description of Homeboy Industries that one of the members of the community used as he writes, "They highlight you there," (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 82).

He continues, "Still, we find our roots that are eternal and cannot be tugged out.

Resurrection has to be embraced with every breath, and it changes how we see things. All of us are saved; there really is no alternative. The only difference is being aware that this has happened in you. Knowing it is everything. We feel 'highlighted,'" (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 83).

Who are the people who have highlighted you and have made you feel truly seen? Who are the conversation partners you will seek out during your time at Boston College to help you consider your interconnectedness with God and with those around you?

...

Following St. Ignatius' recuperation, he embarked on a pilgrimage where he dedicated his life to serving God and had an experience

of seeing the world around him with new eyes and finding God in all things. Boyle references the power of seeing with new eyes throughout the book, including this conversation with Joseph, one of the people from Homeboy Industries:

“I think life,” he says, “is just removing the blindfold.”

I agree with him, but ask, “What do you see, Joseph, when the blindfold falls?”

He pauses, then gently pats his chest. “Goodness.” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 65).

Have you had an experience of seeing with new eyes? How did that experience change how you see goodness in the world?

...

Boyle recounts the story of Saul, who was able to overcome the suspicion of two strangers. “Saul had softened them into some tender corner. He had erased lines that had been drawn pretty clearly. There is a kind of dosing that goes where relationships haven’t yet been and ensures that no one runs out of them. From chaos to community. One dose at time,” (*Cherished Belonging*, pp. 98-99).

In our world today, there are often lines that are drawn clearly. How can you engage with others to “soften them into some tender corner”?

...

Boyle uses the voices of many people with whom he has walked to illustrate the importance of cherished belonging by sharing their stories – and inviting us to consider our own stories. “Our narratives need revising. Healing is in order and compassion is required. If we could see the secret history of each person, it would surely disarm our hearts,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 46).

“We are all seeking a more powerful narrative of our belonging,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 10).

*As you enter Boston College, who has helped shape your story this far?
Who will continue to shape your story over the course of the next
four years?*

...

Boyle refers to experiences of belonging as he writes, “Jeong is one of Korea’s most defining cultural concepts. It is a deep connection and emotional bond. Much like mitzvah, it’s an engagement of righteous action that is endlessly connecting us to each other. It creates lasting kinship and encourages generosity. It’s forever, and different from love. It fosters mutual understanding beyond the tight circle of those who share your experience. People feel seen. It’s like Ubuntu in South Africa. It posits that our health as a community is inextricably linked to the thriving of everyone in the community. What gets cultivated is a warmth and kindness that genuinely wants another to be happy,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 97).

And later he describes ubuntu again, “A person is only a person through other persons,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 149).

Where have you experienced that feeling of connectedness in your life?

...

Boyle writes about the distinction between forgiveness and mercy. “Forgiveness is mercy in a minor key. Mercy is love without expectations,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 25).

“There is no waiting in mercy, as there is in forgiveness. Forgiveness is the raft, but mercy is the shore. We want to get to the shore. Mercy is letting go. Forgiveness is holding on. God never waits for us to get things right before loving us,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 25).

“Beyond discord and strife, we can find the light inside of everything, and we can inhabit that light. Mercy within mercy within mercy,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 28).

In your life, where have you experienced forgiveness and mercy? Where have you shown forgiveness and mercy to others?



THE EXAMEN

The practice of attentiveness is an embodied one that continually engages the whole person. Boyle writes, “There is a famous story about a Zen master who was asked about the highest teaching of Zen. He wrote the word ‘Attention’ on the blackboard. The student persisted and asked, ‘But isn’t there anything else?’ The master said, ‘Yes, there is,’ and once again, he wrote the word ‘Attention’ on the blackboard. The student insisted, ‘There must be something more.’ And his teacher turned to the board and wrote yet another time, ‘Attention.’ Now the board announced, ‘Attention. Attention. Attention.’ It is all that is required, since attention will always bring us back to the present. We are continually saved in the present moment.”

He adds, “Pádraig Ó Tuama says that prayer is greeting. He suggests that it is a training ground for the curiosity we’ll need when we choose to pay attention to each other,” (*Cherished Belonging*, p. 145).

For St. Ignatius, this attentiveness and full engagement with the world leads to a recognition of gratitude. In his homily at the University’s Mass of Gratitude in 2018, Boston College President William P. Leahy, S.J. spoke about the value of this practice. “This process of pausing to reflect about who and what we are grateful for, I think encourages a deeper appreciation in how we have been blessed by our friends, family, relationships, experiences, and opportunities.” He added, “We know well that for flowers and any plant to grow and flourish it obviously needs to be put in soil, it needs to be watered, it needs to be fertilized – and then it blossoms. We, in our own way, are to bear fruit that lasts, that has impact, that fosters peace and reconciliation and hope in our day” (Mass of Gratitude, May 6, 2018).

What are the moments in which you feel a sense of gratitude?

One of the ways in which St. Ignatius manifested his gratitude was through the Examen.

The Ignatian tradition encourages reflection on our experience of God in the world in a mode of prayer called the Examen. The Examen is a prayer in five parts which helps individuals move through an examination of conscience, allowing the experiences of the day to guide one's reflection. Its basis is in Christianity, but it can also be considered in light of other faith traditions.

At first it might be helpful to move through all five of the points, spending two or three minutes on each, just to see what works for you. Or you may want to remain on the first point, giving thanks, after an especially great day. Or there may be times when you want to consider your career or a possible long-term relationship and then you might spend time on orienting your future. There is no single way to make the examination. The only essential is to bring your day before God. At the core of the examination is self-awareness before God. Its power lies in the way you become conscious of your own relationship with God, with your own spirituality.

- **Giving Thanks.** *I thank God for the way God has met me today—in the work I have done, in the people I have encountered, in the letters from home, etc. I begin my prayer with the solid hope that God cares for me, knows me and loves me with an everlasting love.*
- **Seeking Light.** *I ask for light to understand the specific moments in which God has clarified who I am, what my gifts really are, and how I treat other people. I ask not to hide from the truth. I ask to be gentle with myself and honest, too. I ask to learn from God who I am.*

- **Reviewing Life.** *I go over the events of the day, noticing the ones where I felt closer to God and the ones where I felt distanced from God. Where today I met weakness or failure, I ask for forgiveness and self-acceptance. Where today I have lived faithfully and productively, I rejoice in God's service. God does not ask the impossible from me, only the good that I can do and be.*
- **Noting Patterns.** *I stand before my history as God does—lovingly wise about who I am, eager to make me part of the work of the Kingdom, allowing me to understand the patterns of my life that lead me to a more personal sense of how God calls me here at Boston College. Are there emerging insights about the life I should live? Are there difficulties that I keep trying to avoid and know I must face? Are there people, places and occasions that especially open me to God? And are there people, places, and occasions that bring out the worst in me? What does God want me to do with the person that I am becoming?*
- **Orienting My Future.** *Finally, I ask to live as Christ did. I look at the pattern of openness and the essentials of his teaching. I look at the trust he had in God's design for the world. I look at his availability to people. I accept the strategy of forgiveness, truthfulness and service that Christ portrayed. I want to believe that I am called to live just as Christ was, as a woman or man for others. Of course, I will fail. But failure can be the way to wisdom and compassion if I use failure to know myself better and to understand the human heart more deeply. More importantly, I look ahead out of the successes of the day. I ask to live with a growing sense of God's trust in my future (The Red Book 2009, pp. 115, 117).*



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION AT BOSTON COLLEGE

The reflective practice of the Examen is one that Rev. Anthony Penna, prayed that a recent graduating class would take with them from Boston College into the world.

Just before Commencement he offered these words to them:

St. Ignatius said that the world's great sin is the lack of gratitude. So, I'm going to ask you to consider integrating this simple ritual into your daily life when you move on from Boston College. Every night before you go to bed, take a few minutes to think about your day. Examine the day reflectively, the ups and the downs (for no day is without a few bumps in the road, as is true for a four-year college career). Then, identify one thing that occurred, one thing that happened in the day for which you are grateful and give thanks for that one thing. Let that be the way you end every day before you fall to sleep. If you do this, you'll be a healthier, happier, more spiritual, and more balanced person. This practice will be good for you and everyone else who's a part of your life as well (Boston College Class of 2015 Senior Class Toast, May 14, 2015).

We renew his prayer for our students joining the Boston College community in Fall 2025 as you begin your time here.

*This reading guide was developed by Maura Colleary,
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Teach us, good Lord, to serve You
as You deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labor and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will.

—St. Ignatius Loyola

Falling in Love with God

Nothing is more practical than finding God,
that is, falling in love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.
It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you will do with your evenings,
how you will spend your weekends,
what you read,
who you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love,
stay in love,
and it will decide everything.

—Pedro Arrupe, S.J.



**CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR:
A PROGRAM OF THE OFFICE OF FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE**



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