

BOSTON COLLEGE

"I couldn't put **ROUGH SLEEPERS** down. I am left in awe of the human spirit and inspired to do better." —**ABRAHAM VERGHESE**

TRACY KIDDER

Pulitzer Prize-winning author of
MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS

ROUGH SLEEPERS

**DR. JIM O'CONNELL'S
URGENT MISSION TO BRING
HEALING TO HOMELESS PEOPLE**

**FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC CONVOCATION
SEPTEMBER 2023**



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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 *ROUGH SLEEPERS*?

“Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words” (SE 230). These words offered by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus – the Jesuits – in the fourth week of the Spiritual Exercises are brought to life by the work of Dr. Jim O’Connell and Boston’s Healthcare for the Homeless, the subject of Tracy Kidder’s book, *Rough Sleepers*.

As a member of the class of 2027, each of you will have the opportunity to read *Rough Sleepers* and to welcome its author, Tracy Kidder, to Boston College to discuss this work.

In his book, *The Ignatian Adventure*, Kevin O’Brien, S.J. expands upon this insight of St. Ignatius, “Love must be put into action; words are not enough... Ignatian spirituality is one of mission” (excerpted in *The Jesuit Post*, March 23, 2012).

In this book, Kidder chronicles O’Connell’s work and the mission that he lives out in his commitment to caring for the homeless in Boston as he puts love into action. As O’Connell intimates to Kidder, “There are some things you just do because it’s the right thing to do. And the outcome is out of my hands or in somebody else’s hands. I want to believe there’s value in that...” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 12).

The book tells the stories of O’Connell and the other health care professionals as well as some of the members of the homeless community whom they serve and accompany. The stories highlight the dignity of each person and the importance of integrating care for the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of a person.

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 (from *The Journey Into Adulthood*, p. 1).*

This ongoing conversation is 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.” (From *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. As members of the Class of 2027, your conversation will include this book which invites you to consider how accompaniment with others will lead to greater understanding of yourself and how the experience of vulnerability and reflection inform how you engage with the world around you.

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. (from *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.** (from *A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education*).

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.” (from *The Journey Into Adulthood*, p. 21).



ACCOMPANIMENT: WITHIN AND BEYOND BC

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” (from 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, Fr. 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 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ (From "Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations," Fr. 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 values of caring for and educating the whole person and engaging in conversation with others are intimately connected with the practice of accompaniment.

This emphasis on accompaniment and presence supports 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 practice of accompaniment is also an integral 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 develop greater empathy and understanding and to be changed.

In Summer 2020, Boston College developed an 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.

Haub Vice President for Mission and Ministry, Fr. Jack Butler, S.J., spoke about the way we 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." He added that administrators, faculty, staff, and students all participate in these conversations together. "I think, as the VP... that the very dynamic of the University itself is what am I doing to help people to remember who they are at their core, human beings, called to be in relationship and that the greatest power we have as a human being is the skill of empathy, because that's what change is going to come about when we allow people to touch us, to challenge us in a way that makes us feel vulnerable. That's where we join for the pilgrim, I think."

Vice Provost for Global Engagement and Theology Department Professor Fr. James Keenan, S.J., noted that administrators, faculty, and staff members are eager to serve as conversation partners with students. "...They begin to see, through accompaniment, that they can be a receptive pilgrim, that they can provide an open door, that they can be ready to be present and listen, that they may not have to solve everything, but receiving and being present and accompanying are really rather key."

The Society of Jesus emphasized this commitment to accompaniment in 2019 when they announced the Universal Apostolic Preferences that will guide their mission and work over the next ten years. One of the four Universal Apostolic Preferences is "Walking with the Excluded":

"The Universal Apostolic Preferences are a call to conversion. They are an invitation to rethink how we live, how we work and how we relate to the people we serve."

With those words, Fr. General Arturo Sosa took the floor at the Discernment and Leadership meeting in Rome, Italy. Before a group of 50 leaders of Jesuits ministries across the world, both Jesuits and lay colleagues, Fr. General explained his vision for the "Universal Apostolic Preferences" and how they will guide the Society of Jesus. (<https://www.jesuits.global/2019/04/02/universal-apostolic-preferences-call-us-to-conversion/>)

America Media editor-at-large and author Fr. James Martin, S.J., M.Div. '98, Th.M. '99, also a Boston College graduate, wrote about the importance of this preference in a recent article in *America* magazine:

“Here is how the preference is described by the Jesuit Curia: “Walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a ministry of reconciliation and justice.” I find that so beautiful. It is exactly what Jesus did, as he reached out to those on the margins, and it is what so many of my brothers and our colleagues in ministry have done since the founding of the Society in 1540.”

(James Martin, S.J.: Four lessons from my Jesuit ministry of walking with the excluded, March 29, 2022)

Martin summarized these lessons:

Four lessons learned in ministry, in many places over many years:

1. Treat people like individuals, not categories.
2. Treat people like kings and queens.
3. Don't assume you know what they need.
4. Don't assume you know everything about their lives.

@JamesMartinSJ Twitter post March 29, 2022

Fr. Gregory Boyle, S.J., M.Div.'84, a Jesuit priest and founder and director of Homeboy Industries, emphasizes that accompaniment comes through service and recognizing our kinship with those whom we encounter:

The measure of our compassion lies not in our service of those on the margins, but only in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them. For the truth of the matter is this: If we don't welcome our own wounds, we may well be tempted to despise the wounded. We discover in speaking the whole language and seeing the whole person, in welcoming our wound and the wounded, that Christianity is what we do, and not just adherence to a list of beliefs we hold in our head. We embrace the same architecture of the heart of Jesus. And so we seek to take seriously what Jesus took seriously.

They're only four things. They're big, but only four: inclusion, nonviolence, unconditional loving kindness, and compassionate acceptance. If we do those things, we have aligned our hearts with the mystical heart of Jesus, being held by the notion of God that is spacious and expansive, the God who loves us without measure and without regret. And that's the hope in our mystical seeing, that we will embrace the very things that Jesus took seriously. And so we go to the margins, not to make a difference, but so that the folks at the margins make me different.

(Boyle, S.J., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry Daniel J. Harrington Lecture “The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness,” March 25, 2021)

In an interview with NPR's Krista Tippett for On Being, Boyle talked about how the Jesuits – the Society of Jesus – led him to this work of accompaniment:

...“la Compañía de Jesús” is what St. Ignatius called the thing, so it's about being in companionship with Jesus. And St. Ignatius, in his spiritual exercises, has a meditation called “The Two Standards.” And in it he says, very simply, “See Jesus standing in the lowly place.” It's not about saluting a set of beliefs, necessarily; it's about walking with Jesus and being a companion. And I haven't found anything that's brought me more life or joy than standing with Jesus, but also with the particularity of standing in the lowly place with the easily despised and the readily left out, and with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop, and with the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. And I find the fullness of life in trying to, as best I can, in my own way, to stand there.

(On Being with Krista Tippett, Greg Boyle The Calling of Delight: Gangs, Service, and Kinship, Original Air Date February 26, 2013, Last Updated December 19, 2019)

Throughout the book we find examples of how O'Connell “stands there”, realizing that the true value in the medical care they are offering is in the “care”. Early in the book, O'Connell shares the lessons he learned at the Pine Street Inn clinic soaking the feet of the patients there.

“Foot soaking in a homeless shelter – the biblical connotations were obvious. But for Jim, what counted most were the practical lessons, the way this simple therapy reversed the usual order – placing the doctor at the feet of the people he was trying to serve. As a doctor in training, he’d spent most of his time telling patients what he thought, saying, ‘We need to get that blood pressure down,’ or ‘I’m concerned about the results of your kidney tests.’ This new approach was entirely different, and, he began to realize, it was much more effective clinically, at least with homeless people. And foot soaking was the perfect way to begin” (*Rough Sleepers*, pp. 31-32).

He later adds, “Once a patient was engaged, the first imperative wasn’t measuring vital signs, but rather enacting a saying of Barbara’s: ‘You just have to be there and be present and, if need be, stand with them in the darkness’” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 90).

O’Connell also appeared on *The Show@6* in Summer 2020, alongside Roseanne Haggerty from Community Solutions. In that conversation, O’Connell again recalled the wisdom he learned from Barbara McInnis:

“So our version of getting to know names was Barbara made me, the Pine Street nurses were phenomenal, if you’ve never seen it, we still do it at St. Francis house, but they soak people’s feet, that’s how you get to know them. And people are pretty, you know, it’s a long way from the personal space if you’re soaking somebody’s feet, it’s got a lot of biblical significance, but in fact, it’s just a very soothing act of service, but I had to spend two months. I couldn’t do any doctoring for the first two months I started. I had to soak feet, in fact Barbara stole my stethoscope, put it away in the drawer, and I couldn’t be a doctor, I had to be soaking feet. And I learned a lot then...if you’re really going to make a difference in somebody’s life, get to care for them in some way, they have to trust you, you have to be consistent, you have to have a cup of coffee with them...” (from *The Show@6* June 19, 2020).

This presence and standing with the patients allowed for the care of the person and the accompaniment that was to become the hallmark of their work.



SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Reflection is a key element in the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). In May 1521, Ignatius Loyola was wounded in a battle in Pamplona, Spain. His leg was shattered by a cannon ball 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, *The Life of Christ* and Butler’s *Lives of the Saints*. 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?

Accompaniment takes place with those with whom we are in relationship and those who are on the margins for us.

“And so in the covenant God says, “As I have loved you, so must you have a special preferential care and love for the widow, orphan, and the stranger.” And these were the people who were left out. These were the people who society at the time looked at and said, we can live without you. And so we want to go to the margins and say, we refuse to live without you, widow, orphan, stranger. “

(Boyle, S.J., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry Daniel J. Harrington Lecture “The Whole Language: The Power of Extravagant Tenderness,” March 25, 2021)

***Who are the people who have accompanied you on your journey?
In what ways, have they told you that they refuse to live without you?***

“During question and answer time, a company employee who looked to be about 30 raised his hand and said, ‘so I live in the city, and I have desensitized myself to these homeless people.’

Suddenly his voice breaking, he said that he had learned first to step over people, sleeping in doorways, and now he’d mastered the art of not seeing them at all. ‘And they’re not even evil.’

I was struck by the emotion in the man’s response. Most people who came to Jim’s talks already knew the abstract truths about American homelessness – that it is the direst form of poverty, that it consigns people to appalling miseries and kills them well before their time. The mild tone of Jim’s slideshow stories let a listener take in that reality, through the experiences of actual people. The effect, for some, at least, was to make a harsh part of the American world, new again, and visible” (*Rough Sleepers*, pp. 204-205).

***How have we become desensitized to the injustices in our world?
Who do we fail to see?***

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.”

(Boyle, S.J., Boston College School of Theology and Ministry Daniel J. Harrington 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.

Kidder notes that there were times when O’Connell and the Street Team felt the tension between the care they were providing and the long-term results:

“Standing near the station entrance, Jim said he’d also been thinking about the Street Team. He felt as though he was seeing his own past through them, watching them realize, as he had, that they could do a lot for patients from day to day but not much to fix the real causes of their misery. When he had felt near despair, both exhausted and awake to how ineffective his efforts were on the grand scale, he’d had Barbara McInnis to counsel him, to tell him, ‘Who are you? God? Your job is to take care of that broken foot.’ It was his turn to play a role like Barbara’s with the newer members of his team, to help them find defenses against spiritual exhaustion. If he could” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 153).

O’Connell noted that the value of focusing on the person in front of him, which he first learned from Barbara McInnis at the Pine Street Inn, helped to balance the both/and of addressing the issue of homelessness:

Often he’d start by invoking Barbara: “The older I get, the more I realize how wise she was, I remember somebody coming into the clinic, and saying to Barbara, who was working like hell, ‘What are we going to do to fix this both problem of homelessness?’ And she looked up and said, ‘Are you kidding me? I’m too busy. Don’t ask

me a question like that.’ That was her way of saying, ‘Stop torturing me with what society isn’t about to do. Let’s just do the best we can right now and take care of these folks.’

Jim paused, then wrapped up his case: “But do I want to hold that caring up as a gold standard? No. I want to hold it up as, “This is what we do while we’re waiting for the world to change” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 107).

How do you measure success? In the day-to-day or in the grand scale? How do you reconcile the tension between what needs to be done in this moment and what needs to be done in the long-term?

Presence and accompaniment are particularly important as we wrestle with the racial, social, and political tensions in our world. Allowing ourselves to see through the lens of another can challenge us to reframe our perspective. When we commit to being vulnerable and open to change, we learn more about ourselves and those with whom we are in relationship.

“At the gala, before he made his exit, Jim told the audience, ‘I like to think of this problem of homelessness, as a prism held up to society, and what we see refracted are the weaknesses in our healthcare system, our public health system, our housing system, but especially in our welfare system, our educational system, and our legal system – and our corrections system. If we’re going to fix this problem, we have to address the weaknesses of all those sectors’” (*Rough Sleepers*, pp, 211-212).

How can you engage in conversation around these issues on a societal and on a personal level? Are there ways that you can foster dialogue and promote reconciliation in these divisive times? Are there ways that you can bring to light structural, personal, and social issues of our time by being open to others and engaging in conversation?

As our country struggles with divisiveness, how do you approach conversations about and across difference? What experiences have helped you empathize with people who are different from you? What experiences have helped you to be more vulnerable with people?

In a recent homily, Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences Dean Gregory Kalscheur, S.J. urged the community to show that same reconciliation and spirit of conversion in the way they treat others on campus:

“Do we look at one another with compassion?” Kalscheur asked. “We know we live in a world that needs reconciliation – and that begins with the compassion with which we look on each other.”

(Gregory Kalscheur, S.J., Homily on Laetare Sunday, 11:00 a.m. Mass, March 27, 2022).

This was a similar message that JoAnne offered to the doctors in training when O’Connell invited her to speak to them:

“If I tell you I have a pain in my heart, chances are I have a pain in my heart. You gotta listen, that’s the key: You have to have compassion. That’s the other key. You have to just not be afraid have touch anybody, not be afraid to feel and care and to allow people to tell you what’s going on with their lives” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 161).

How you can you be an agent for reconciliation in today’s world? How can you show compassion to those you encounter at Boston College?

O’Connell notes early on in the book that he did not anticipate that this would become his life:

“But when you work with people who’ve had so little chance in life, there’s a lot you can do. You try to take care of people, meet them where they are, figure out who they are, figure out what they need, how you can ease their suffering.

I was drafted into this job, I didn’t pick it, but I lucked into the best job I can imagine” (*Rough Sleepers*, p. 19).

On the title page of *Rough Sleepers*, the title is noted as “*Rough sleepers*: Dr Jim O’Connell and his quest to created community of care”.

As you begin your BC experience, we want you to think about what it means for you to be part of a community of care? How can you contribute to that? How will you grow from that? How will you use your “gifts and talents to advance the common good”?



THE EXAMEN

Throughout the book, O’Connell and his team showcase the importance of connection and how connection generates a sense of mutuality. O’Connell’s colleague, Julie, talks about her gratitude for the human connection she experiences in her work with Healthcare for the Homeless:

“She tried to explain her feelings in a note: ‘What I know for sure is that there seems to be something about being with someone (and I mean really with them, not distracted by cellphones or computers or with an intention to fill a medication or fill out paperwork) that dignifies his / her existence. What interesting is that I, too, in these moments, feel that same deep sense of gratitude. Maybe I have holes in my life that patients fill? Or maybe there is something to be said for the beauty of human connection that reminds us how complete we already are’” (*Rough Sleepers*, pp. 182-183).

What are the moments in which you feel a sense of gratitude? Who are the people who make real the power of human connection for you?

One of the ways in which St. Ignatius made manifest 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 important, 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*)

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



BOSTON COLLEGE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE
RAHNER HOUSE, 96 COLLEGE ROAD
CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02467-3805
PH (617) 552-3281
(800) 335-5853
FAX (617) 552-3968
WWW.BC.EDU/FYE