

BOSTON COLLEGE

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

**RECLAIMING
CONVERSATION**

**THE POWER OF TALK
IN A DIGITAL AGE**



“A singular voice in the discourse about technology.”

—Jonathan Franzen, *The New York Times Book Review*

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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 this Conversations in the First Year program, to classroom discussions, to late-night confidences with roommates and friends, to dialogues with on-campus speakers, to mentoring talks with faculty and staff members, to engagement with the local and global community that surrounds the Heights – Boston College encourages students to ask big questions, to reflect, and to respond in the most loving way to the world around you.

Boston College values conversation and emphasizes its role in formation both inside and outside the classroom. Jesuit scholar and author John Padberg, S.J. notes that conversation has been an important part of the work of the Society of Jesus since the order's inception:

Simple, friendly and informal conversations were the earliest and chief means that Ignatius employed in helping people. Right from his conversion in 1521 he wanted, to use his own words, “to help souls.” The way he started was to talk to people, men and women, young and old, about the things that really mattered to them and to him. Such simple talk, such conversation, was the beginning of the life and works of the Society of Jesus.

The term “conversation” in its most obvious sense means to talk with someone and, by so doing, to exchange sentiments, observations, opinions and ideas. Ignatius had that meaning in mind, but he also intended the older and more inclusive meaning of 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 Society in its members has carried on a great variety of such conversations. Among them, to cite but a few general areas, have been conversations with the secular world in all its variety, with other religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian, with the tradition and practices and personalities of its own Church, with itself among each generation of its own members and, finally, with the Lord. (From With Christ Alive: Reflections on the Risen Christ, the Acts of the Apostles and Our Jesuit Vocation 1998, p. 48)

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.



WHY READ *RECLAIMING CONVERSATION*?

As a member of the class of 2025, each of you will have the opportunity to read *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* and to welcome its author, Sherry Turkle, to Boston College to discuss this work. Sherry Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at MIT, and the founding director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self. Professor Turkle received a joint doctorate in sociology and personality psychology from Harvard University and is a licensed clinical psychologist. Professor Turkle writes on the “subjective side” of people’s relationships with technology, especially computers. She is an expert on culture and therapy, mobile technology, social networking, and sociable robotics.

In her book, Turkle emphasizes that in order to fully engage with another in conversation, we must first take the time to be reflective. By getting to know ourselves better, we can get to know others better; and in those conversations learning about others, we often gain greater understanding of our own values and beliefs. Advances in technology have made communication faster and more efficient for recent generations. In *Reclaiming Conversation*, Turkle posits that with this increased speed there has also been a loss of connection. While people are able to use devices to be in constant contact, technology also creates a distance – and this distance reduces the capacity for empathy.

“Face-to-face conversation is the most human – and humanizing – thing we do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It’s where we develop the capacity for empathy. It’s where we experience the joy of being heard, of being understood. And

conversation advances self-reflection, the conversations with ourselves that are the cornerstone of early development and continue throughout life.” (p. 3)

Turkle argues that while people imagine that constant communication through technology means better communication because it is more frequent, the technology creates a gap in understanding.

“It all adds up to a flight from conversation – at least from conversation that is open-ended and spontaneous, conversation in which we play with ideas, in which we allow ourselves to be fully present and vulnerable. Yet these are the conversations where empathy and intimacy flourish and social action gains strength. These are the conversations in which the creative collaborations of education and business thrive.” (p. 4)

As you read *Reclaiming Conversation*, it is the hope of the University that you will consider how you open your heart and mind to empathy and vulnerability while managing the increasing role of technology in our world. As Turkle writes, “Conversation is on the path toward the experience of intimacy, community, and communion. Reclaiming conversation is a step toward reclaiming our most fundamental human values.” (p. 7)

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 to 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 2025, your conversation will include this book which invites you to consider how conversation leads to greater understanding of yourself and others and how that experience of reflection and empathy informs 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 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.

Turkle highlights the many places where conversation helps to further relationship. She talks about the importance of conversation at home, at work, in the public sphere, in therapy, and in the classroom, and beyond. She writes, “Conversations in these traditions have a lot in common. When they work best, people don’t just speak but listen, both to others and to themselves. They allow themselves to be vulnerable. They are fully present and open to where things might go.” (p. 9)

She notes that in order to engage in conversation and to deepen these relationships we need also to find time in solitude to reflect. “In solitude we find ourselves; we prepare ourselves to come to conversation with something to say that is authentic, ours. When we are secure in ourselves we are able to listen to other people and really hear what they have to say. And then in conversation with other people we become better at inner dialogue.” (p. 10)

Later in the book, she returns to the idea of mutuality as essential to conversation. “Conversation implies something kinetic. It is derived from words that mean ‘to tend to each other, to lean toward each other,’ words about the *activity of relationship*, one’s ‘manner of conducting oneself in the world or in society; behavior, mode or course of life.’ To converse, you don’t just to have to perform turn taking, you have to listen to someone else, to read their body, their voice, their tone, and their silences. You bring your concern and experience to bear, and you expect the same from others.” (pp. 43-44)

Only by having a sense of ourselves can we share our own vulnerabilities and be open to others sharing theirs with us. “It’s the capacity for solitude that allows you to reach out to others and see them as separate and independent. You don’t need them to be anything other than who they are. This means you can listen to them and hear what they have to say. This makes the capacity for solitude essential to the development of empathy. And this is why solitude marks the beginning of conversations virtuous circle. If you are comfortable with yourself, you can put yourself in someone else’s place.” (p. 61)

Turkle notes that our solitude is challenged by our propensity to turn toward technology rather than to turn inward. In the same way that Turkle advocates for using technology with intentionality, she also advocates for being intentional about finding opportunities for solitude. She writes, “How can the capacity for solitude be cultivated? With attention and respectful conversation.” (p. 65)



CURA PERSONALIS AND ACCOMPANIMENT

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 in our conversations, rather than reducing our relationship to a series of compartmentalized transactions. By recognizing that each person we encounter has their own story, hopes, dreams, and vulnerabilities, we create greater opportunity to understand them as whole persons in a greater context.

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.

In the service of cura personalis, the writings of Ignatius and early Jesuits contain yet another gem, and one that bears numerous connections to other Jesuit values. It is the art of “spiritual conversation.”

*Shortly after his spiritual conversion at Castle Loyola, Ignatius began to recognize that engaging people in relatively informal, spontaneous, one-on-one conversations about God, faith, and ‘best practices’ in the spiritual life, was a powerful means to edify both them and him. (From “Cura Personalis: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” Fr. Barton T. Geger, S.J., *Jesuit Higher Education* 3(2): 6-20 (2014).*

The value of caring for and educating the whole person and engaging in conversation with others are intimately connected with the practice of accompaniment.

In *Reclaiming Conversation*, Turkle draws upon the work of former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams who focused on what empathy provides to the person who offers it. “For Williams, the empathetic relationship does not begin with ‘I know how you feel.’ Empathy, for Williams, is an offer of accompaniment and

commitment. And making the offer changes you. When you have a growing awareness of how much you don't know about someone else, you begin to understand how much you don't know about yourself. You learn, says Williams, 'a more demanding kind of attention. You learn patience and a new skill and habit of perspective.'" (p. 172)

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, 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 Jim 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."

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.

America Media editor-at-large and author James Martin, S.J., also a Boston College graduate, referenced the work of Rev. Bryan Massengale at Fordham University and talked about how his work on race has helped him be more present to others. "One of the things that really was revelatory to me and helpful was [Massengale's] comment that what defines the limits of the conversation is white comfort," Martin said. "So, when white people get uncomfortable about whatever it is, reparations or the protests, the way the protests are happening, the rioting. Whenever white people get uncomfortable about that, it means that the conversation stops. I found that really struck me in that it was an invitation to put up with some discomfort. So, I've been watching things online and talking to people that are really outside my comfort zone, that I normally wouldn't watch and normally would read to challenge me. So, I think it's about being uncomfortable."

Turkle echoes this idea of making conversations about more than information sharing, even when that is uncomfortable. "There is another way to think about conversation, one that is less about information and more about creating a space to be explored. You are interested in hearing about how another person approaches things – his or her opinions and associations. In this kind of conversation – I think of it as "whole person conversation" – if

things go quiet for a little while you look deeper, you don't look away or text another friend. You try to read your friend in a different way. Perhaps you look into their faces or attend to their body language. Or you allow for silence. Perhaps when we talk about conversations being 'boring,' such a frequent complaint, we are saying how uncomfortable we are with stillness. And how hard we find it to 'read' the face and voice, changes in body language, and changes in tone." (p.151)

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."*

Reflection is a key element in the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). As the class of 2025 enters Boston College, you do so as the Society of Jesus celebrates the 500th anniversary of Saint Ignatius conversion experience. 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 lead Ignatius into this reflective experience changed his life and as a result, Ignatius changed the world.

Is there a cannonball moment in your life that changed your course? 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?

Cultivating the space for reflection helps us to focus on the people with whom we want to be in conversation. "This tradition of self-

reflection stresses history, the meaning of language, and the power of the unconscious. It teaches us that our lives are “peopled” by those who have mattered most to us. They live within us for better and worse. We learn to recognize their influence in our strengths and vulnerabilities.” (p. 80)

Who are the people who have mattered most to you? In what ways, for better and worse, do they live within you? How do you see their influence in your own strengths and vulnerabilities?

Turkle does not advocate for banishing technology, but rather for being more intentional about how we use it. “Mobile technology is here to stay, along with all the wonders it brings. Yet it is time for us to consider how it may get in the way of other things we hold dear – and how once we recognize this, we can take action: We can both redesign technology and change how we bring it into our lives.” (p. 7)

Turkle encourages us to create boundaries for our use of technology, stressing that constant focus on technology creates a “world full of missed opportunities.” (p. 109)

Can you think of opportunities you have missed because you were not fully present in the moment? Are there relationships that have been hurt because of this lack of presence?

“... social media is set up to teach different lessons. Instead of promoting the value of authenticity, it encourages performance. Instead of teaching the rewards of vulnerability, it suggests that you put on your best face. And instead of learning how to listen, you learn what goes into any effective broadcast.” (pp. 109-110)

Are we so busy documenting our lives that we are never present, never in the moment?

What kind of boundaries would you like to create around your use of technology? How will you apply those boundaries to the way you engage with friends, roommates, classmates during your time at Boston College?

In a recent *Time Magazine* article, Turkle comments on how the pandemic has given us new opportunities for empathy.

Empathy is a first step. It doesn't begin with "I know how you feel." But with the humility to say that you don't know how another feels. So, it begins with an offer to listen: "Tell me how you feel." Empathy is an offer of accompaniment and commitment. It offers hope to the person who is being heard and it enlarges the person who offers it. When you realize how much you have to learn about someone else, you understand how much you don't know about yourself..

To be empathic is to embrace and own your own complexity and limitations. The gift of our quarantine was time to feel othered—to America and to ourselves. Because once you are a stranger to what is most familiar to you, you can take in the complexity of the world. The weight of seeing things as binary choices falls away. The striking thing about living through dramatic change is you are right there when something that once seemed odd begins to seem natural. The trick is to remember why it once seemed odd because that might be a reason worth remembering...

We've seen the limits of lives on the screen. We had time to observe ourselves because we were as though experimental subjects. We can both admire the efficiencies of remote work, sometimes, and crave the full embrace of the human. We both used technology with greater invention, and we missed each other more. We are in a position to be wary of pundits who try to sell us on "the end of the office" or the "solution" of online education. To figure out what really works, you need to get into the fine details. We're in position to choose the mix of virtual and face-to-face encounters for different jobs. And to demand that when we do a job, our technology is not spying on us or our children. ("The Pandemic Made Us Strangers to Ourselves. Will We Have Learned Anything When It's Over?" [Time Magazine, MARCH 16, 2021](#)).

Reclaiming Conversation was published before the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Turkle's exhortation for us to be intentional about the use of technology has applied throughout the pandemic. Her recognition that technology is no substitute

for communication also applies. After a year and a half of communicating through technology, there are gaps in the way that we connect with others and distances that our devices cannot bridge. In a time where we have been most vulnerable, we have been least able to connect with others.

As we move out of the pandemic, how will you be more intentional about your use of technology? As you begin your Boston College experience, how will you strive to cultivate space for conversation?

“We become accustomed to seeing life as something we can pause in order to document it, get another thread and running in it, or hook it up to another feed. We’ve seen that in all this activity, we no longer experience interruptions as disruptions. We experience them as connection. We seek them out, and when they are not there, we create them. Interruptions enable us to avoid difficult feelings and awkward moments. They become a convenience. And overtime we have trained our brains to crave them. Of course, all of this makes it hard to settle down into conversation.” (p. 125)

When we find ways to avoid difficult feelings and awkward moments, we do not take the time to examine our feelings or reflect on what is making us uncomfortable. Rather than exploring what is difficult, we turn toward the interruption. How can we begin to understand the other and have empathy for those who may appear different from us if we avoid discomfort? How can we engage the other if we do not commit to the conversation?

Attentive to the systemic racism that exists in our country and our community, and reflecting on how the University can respond to the issue and its root causes, Boston College has committed to developing initiatives for listening, dialogue, healing, reconciliation, and understanding, including establishing *The Boston College Forum on Racial Justice in America* and a number of programs through University Mission and Ministry. In a letter to the Boston College community in June 2020, University President William P. Leahy, S.J., wrote, “The current anger, division, and alienation result

from long-term, systemic causes, and they call for resolution of underlying issues through immediate and sustained action,” and described the loving response that Boston College will take against racism – both personal and systemic.

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 underlying racism by being open to others and engaging in conversation?

As our country struggles with issues of racial justice, how do you approach conversations about and across difference? What experiences have helped you empathize with people who are different from you?



THE EXAMEN

The goal of Jesuit education is to produce men and women for whom conversation and reflection, action and contemplation, inform how they engage in the world.

Ignatian spirituality suggests an insight. Ignatius’ spiritual growth began when he came to understand that in the ordinary experiences of his daily life, God was somehow conversing with him and leading him in certain directions. When he undertook to help others understand how God was at work in their lives, the medium was always conversation about their experience, aimed at helping them discern how they should act. The early Jesuits thought of their characteristic activities as “ministries of the word,” and one writer has suggested that the central strategy in all their activities was “expert conversation” designed to help their interlocutors come to understand how God was at work in their experience and what this would mean for their lives. To do this

*they employed a three-part dynamic that seems to be characteristic of Ignatian discernment: first by helping them pay attention to their experience; then, by leading them to reflect on its meaning; and, finally, by encouraging them to decide how to act in light of this new understanding. (From *The Journey to Adulthood*, pp. 17-18)*

The Ignatian tradition encourages action and contemplation 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)



CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

“The metaphor for the Catholic intellectual tradition...was ‘a conversation.’ The original meaning of the word converse is ‘to live together,’ ‘to share a life.’ A university illuminated by the Catholic intellectual tradition is a place of shared, transformative, intellectual life—a place where the Church, always acknowledging that there is more to learn, is informed by ongoing scholarship, and where the wisdom developed over centuries within the Catholic tradition permeates a university’s core values, curriculum, and search for truth. The true Catholic university, then, is a community of teachers, scholars, students, and administrators sharing an intellectual journey and conversation in the pursuit of truth. (From *The Catholic Intellectual Tradition: A Conversation at Boston College*)

Boston College provides a number of opportunities to continue the conversation, to engage both in reflection and in conversation.

- Retreat programs through [First Year Experience](#), [Campus Ministry](#), and [Student Affairs](#) that provide opportunities for both reflection and conversation.
- Service and Immersion programs through [Campus Ministry](#) and the [Volunteer and Service Learning Center](#) that provide opportunities for solidarity with others.
- Small group reflection and mentorship opportunities through [Campus Ministry](#) and the [Center for Student Formation](#).
- Conversation and education related to equity and inclusion, including but not limited to: the [Boston College Forum on Racial Justice](#), [Courageous Conversations](#), [Thea Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center programs](#), and [resources around racial justice](#).



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



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