

I- INTRODUCTION

a) Why is it important to create a space for systematic contemplation in schools?

Finding God is the most vital experience in our lives, since it connects us with our origins and our ultimate end. He is the “way”, the one who makes our lives truly meaningful. And this is the vital experience that gives rise to the desire to evangelize (cf. SE 120). The Spiritual Exercises (SE) - God’s gift to St. Ignatius - have helped lots of people fall in love with God and follow Him towards the path of sainthood.

Nowadays, it is a real challenge to invite our students to do the SE, since kids and adolescents are more inclined to use exciting and fast digital screens than to make silence, turn inwards, and meet with God and their inner being face to face; that makes them feel out of their depth.

One of the main features of the SE is that they are flexible. This means that although they were originally designed to last for a whole month, they can also be adapted to each person’s needs, and people can choose between going to a retreat house and making the exercises in the context of their daily lives. But we have also realized that the Spiritual Exercises are also very rich and fruitful when they are savored “in morsels” throughout school time. And so almost by accident, a new method of Ignatian contemplation has been born, which we just call “Ignatian Prayer” (IP) without giving it much thought.

It all started back in 1988 when I was working at a school of *Escolapias*. There I learnt about a very interesting practice called “Continuous Prayer”, which could be traced back to the times of Saint Joseph Calasanz. Adapted to modern times, it involved taking the students to the chapel every fifteen days to pray all together. If the group was too big, it was divided in half. When I was asked to organize that activity, I did what I knew best: praying in the Ignatian way. So, we started contemplating different biblical scenes, following the themes of St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises Weeks, and adapted them to children aged 6 to 12.

Later, I replicated the experience in a poor school in Concordia, and then at Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepción (a.k.a. Inmaculada School) in Santa Fe. Despite religious or socioeconomic differences, the results have been exactly the same — children openly express the joy they experience when praying and complain when, for some reason, the meeting must be cancelled. On many occasions they have said that after praying they feel at ease and in peace (once we heard a child whispering to another “Wow, this is amazing!”, “Yeah, I told you!”).

Every two years, Inmaculada School’s students answer a school quality survey and they always give Ignatian Prayer a high score. The experience has been so fruitful and enriching so far that other schools and parochial churches have adopted it too.

When the initiative was launched at Inmaculada School in 2009, a small group of parents were invited to participate. For quite a long time, they were silent witnesses to the prayer led by a Jesuit. Then, as time went by, they became more confident and started leading the prayer themselves. Today, there is a solid group of parents, called “IP Missionaries”, who pray with the children throughout the primary school years. Every year, the school Rector sends an invitation so that more and more parents can join in. When parents acquire more and more experience, they also participate in workshops organized by a Jesuit to spread the IP practice in other schools and parochial churches.

Parents regard this activity as an invaluable opportunity to get to know Jesus more deeply, since He reveals himself more clearly through children’s eyes. And proof of that is that they persevere year after year, despite the difficulties of juggling a career, family responsibilities and a pastoral project.

In 2014, the first group of students who was exposed to IP in primary school moved to secondary school. In junior high school, the prayer started to be led by the catechist; but in third year (when the children turn 15 or 16 years old) the students started to lead their classmates' prayer. After practicing IP for such a long time, they had become almost experts at the Ignatian methodology. They used a guide (written by Father Leonardo Nardin), but they introduced their own comments, dynamics and expressions to make their peers participate, to motivate silence and contemplation, to make the most out of what their peers share in a loud voice, and to help them with the examen of the prayer. When those students reached the fourth year, they started practicing how to write and design the guides to lead their classmates' prayer. They had to choose a text from the Gospels and divide the scene into sub scenes for their friends to contemplate. This practice was so successful that it has gone on since then.

IP does not only aim at strengthening students' friendship with God and instilling into them the joy of becoming His disciples but also at igniting in them the flame of serving the Church in different apostolic groups.

As a consequence of the systematic practice of IP, the school's Heads of Pastoral Projects have had to redesign some of the pastoral initiatives (such as annual SE, camps, Learning through Service activities), since students have already incorporated certain skills such as communicating with God through silence, engaging into a deep and rich inner dialogue with Him, and contemplating. They find it easy to "dive inside themselves", recognize God's presence, awake their spiritual intelligence, grasp the true evangelical sense, and find ways to relate Jesus' teachings to their lives.

IP takes place during the Religion class and although the children and the prayer leader are the main interlocutors, the grade teacher and the catechists are invited to stay. This is a wonderful source of knowledge for them, and offers them the chance to relate faith to culture by incorporating into their class activities some ideas mentioned during the prayer.

Our dream is that IP will spread out across the world, since we are truly convinced that it has become the humus of the school's pastoral work. Insignificant as it may seem, it has truly increased students' willingness to receive the Good News and commit to building the kingdom of God.

Some of the fruits borne by IP in schools are: students find it easier to make silence, not only when they pray but also when they carry out school activities; they understand the things of God in a simpler though deeper way; they evidence a stronger devotion to the Eucharist. IP also fosters students' spiritual growth and makes them more receptive to the SE - adapted to their evolutionary stage and under the name of IP - to which they are exposed from the time they start kindergarten, when they are three years old, until they graduate at seventeen.

IP is worth the effort!!! True... it takes and demands time, institutional organization, resources (because you must count on a space and people to carry out the project), but it bears fruits beyond the religious and spiritual aspects!! It is essential to count on the School Board's support to insert this activity into the school life schedule.

Other spiritual activities - such as SE and retreats - are always productive but even more so if they are propped up by a systematic and continuous prayer practice; if not, they may soon sink into oblivion. Continuous prayer's results may not look so impressive at first, but in the long run they are deep and solid. Because it involves getting to know the Lord little by little, taking baby steps; it means experiencing his love first-hand so as to internalize his way of feeling, thinking and acting. It means tasting the "sweet flavor" of God through praying, and savoring "every mouthful".

Our dream is that the yeast of God’s life will wake up in our students’ hearts because they have been given the chance to drink from the “river of life”. This is the only way in which they can give an honest answer to their Creator and Lord; it is only through this first-hand experience of God that they will be able to develop ideas, criteria and relationships based on love, justice, peace and joy that will truly transform reality and the world.

Will the Lord dismiss our students’ – and the whole community’s – long-lasting petition to “know Him more clearly, in order to love Him more deeply and follow Him more nearly”? Will He disregard the wishes of these pure souls? By means of this Ignatian petition, we admit our poverty, our constraints, that there are goals - such as having a deeper inner knowledge of His person, to love and follow Him and serve others - that we cannot attain by ourselves because they are a gift from the Lord. As Ignatian educators, we dream that this knowledge, this deep love and conviction will turn our students into authentic disciples of Jesus, who will in turn transform society.

After praying, a very naughty student once said: “I feel I am kinder”. Relating to “The Kind” par excellence can transform, purify us. Our goal is for students to achieve academic excellence but also evangelical kindness - they must be kind to do well to others, and fight for a world with global justice and solidarity. When we relate to God who is The Good Samaritan (with capital letters), we feel impelled to reach out those who are hurt and in need, just like good Samaritans. Enjoying the intimate presence of God first-hand, just like Moses did before the burning bush in the desert, invites us to take risks for the good of our fellow creatures.

In this handbook, you will find SE-based guides for the students in the seven grades of the Primary School. The themes go as follows:

1 st grade: Creation (Principle and Foundation)	1 st week of the SE
2 nd grade: Jesus’ hidden life.	2 nd week of the SE
3 rd grade: Jesus’ public life (miracles and teachings).	
4 th grade: Jesus’ public life (Our Father prayer)	
5 th grade: Jesus’ public life (parables, blessings)	(the two flags, etc.)
6 th grade: Passion and death	3 rd week of the SE
7 th grade: Resurrection and Contemplation to attain Love	4 th week of the SE

There are also guides to be used on certain special occasions, namely:

- Ignatian repetition, to review the previous year themes;
- Introductory work to praying (Moses, Elias);
- Ignatian examen of significant experiences (camps, etc.)

There aren’t guides exclusively written for kindergarten students. But, as during this stage children develop important habits for the rest of their lives, in some schools they work on specific habits and skills that will help during the prayer such as: self-control, silence, imagination, verbal skills, etc.

There aren’t guides exclusively designed for high school students either. It is a pending issue. What schools do in that case is to resort to the guides used in primary school and adapt them to adolescents’ needs.

b) IP Implementation

To implement IP in a school you must count on the School Board's support, since several resources – such as time, places and people – must be allocated to this activity. As time goes by, the practice must be sustained, controlled and supervised in order to assess and improve the experience.

As catholic schools, our ultimate goal is evangelization and IP can help us achieve this goal. So in order to consolidate this space, we must carefully analyze the problems which may impinge on its smooth development: among others, no space or time available and not enough missionaries to lead the prayer.

Let us tackle these problems one by one:

b.1) Defining the Time

The first step is to define how often and at what time students will have IP meetings – it may be weekly, fortnightly (recommended) or monthly. Just to give you an example: In many schools, IP meetings coincide with the Religion class; so when students have a two-hour Religion class weekly, they devote one hour every fortnight to IP. Thus, every two weeks, they have three hours of Religion and one of IP.

It is essential to plan the annual schedule beforehand so that IP missionaries (parents) and school staff can get organized. To do so, the IP Coordinator must jointly work with the Headmaster/mistress, the Secretary, the catechists and the teachers. In order to pick the dates and times for the IP meetings, they must take into account: holidays, extracurricular activities (camps, etc.), the Religion class time, school ceremonies, and other school activities. Once the IP meetings are scheduled, the IP Coordinator makes a timetable and sends it to the missionaries and to the school authorities.

The following is an example of a timetable:

THIRD GRADE – WEDNESDAYS–B, C y A- Theme: Public life

Date	Time	Guide
Wed April 19 th	7.50 to 10.20	Recap of last year
Wed May 10 th	7.50 to 10.20	IGNATIAN EXAMEN OF CAMP (27-4)
Wed May 24 th	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus bids his mother farewell
Wed June 7 th	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus is baptized
Wed June 21 st	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus is tempted in the wilderness
Wed July 5 th	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus announces the kingdom of God
Wed July 26 th	7.50 to 10.20	The miraculous catch of fish
Wed August 9 th	7.50 to 10.20	The calling of the disciples
Wed August 23 rd	7.50 to 10.20	The widow of Nain
Wed September 6 th	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus raises Jairus' daughter from the dead
Wed September 20 th	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus heals a blind near Jericho
Wed October 4 th	7.50 to 10.20	The poor widow
Wed October 18 th	7.50 to 10.20	Zaccheus
Wed November 1 st	7.50 to 10.20	Jesus walks on water

This means that on Wednesdays from 7.50 to 10.20 am third grade students (divided into three groups called A, B and C) have a Religion class. Once every fifteen days, one hour is devoted to IP.

b.2) Defining the Place

We have a body which occupies space; we relate spatially to each other. Our surroundings have an effect on our inner world. So the ideal would be to have a place exclusively devoted to IP, special, different from the rest, because it will be the place where we will meet with God, the most important thing that could ever happen to us personally, and to mankind.

The importance of the place could be signaled by its exclusiveness, beauty, simplicity, silence, austerity. It should resemble the wilderness, in that you just need only the basic stuff. That is the reason why we recommend including very few elements so as to avoid distractions. Modern aesthetics dictates that “more is less and less is more”, so the place should be stripped of too much furniture or too many objects; it should feature one central element to call our attention and that’s it.

The place should help us relate to God and get to know Him who is spirit. There, we should gather as a group round Jesus and in the name of Jesus. That is the reason why the focal point of the chapel/place should be the cross and the tabernacle, because the focal point of Ignatian spirituality is Jesus, our Lord.

Before the tabernacle, there is a space big enough for the whole group to sit down on the floor during the Colloquy. In this space there should be a carpet that we call “the Promised Land”, to lend it symbolic importance. It is the place where we meet with God, the heavenly dwelling where we can rest. One of the missionaries once called it “Jesus’ Heart”, because this is the place where to experience intimacy with God.

The carpet is surrounded by pews where the children sit during the first part of the prayer. When sitting, they should be able to look at each other especially when they share in a loud voice their God-inspired contemplations, thoughts and feelings.

To the left of the cross, there is a picture of the Virgin Mary. She is the protagonist of many prayers so it is important to have an image of her.

If the school has a chapel, everything is much easier!! But sometimes we need more than one, especially if two different groups have an Ignatian prayer meeting at the same time. Smaller schools have solved this problem in the following way: they recreate the conditions in the classroom by moving the desks to the back and rearranging the chairs in a semicircle before an improvised altar. A teacher, for example, keeps a piece of fabric (to be used as the “promised land carpet” during the colloquy) in a cupboard and places it before the altar when they pray; once they finish, she/he rolls it back and puts it away.

b.3) Defining the Themes

Another important point is to define the themes students will pray with throughout their school life. There are several options: to follow the themes of the SE Weeks once during primary school, and once again during high school; or follow the Religion course syllabus and pray with a text of the Old or the New Testament. If the second option is chosen, it is better to adopt an Ignatian approach to the contents (that is to say, to tackle them from the imaginative and affective dimensions), so as to learn the subjects through direct contact with God.

If the first option is chosen, the ideal would be that all the academic activities of the year revolve around the IP themes for each specific grade. Inmaculada school has devised the so-called “theological foci” for each grade, which are related to the IP themes divided per grade (See Annex). Theological Foci are short texts, similar to mission statements, which depict a task to be carried out by the students

and an idea to be reinforced by the teacher throughout the year. For example, first grade prays with Principle and Foundation and the prayers basically deal with the creation; the theological focus for first grade emphasizes the idea that God the Father has created all the things out of love for us; student's task involves taking care of everything because everything is a gift from God; and throughout the year the teacher must reinforce the idea that everything is a gift from God, the Creator.

St. Ignatius said that we should embrace the essential of each time (...It is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul), so it is important to define the essential ideas we want to transmit to our students in each and every moment. That is the main aim of the theological foci. All the other significant experiences – retreats, camps, Learning through Service activities, celebrations, etc.- should also revolve around these theological foci.

b.4) Defining Who Will Lead the Prayers

It is important for IP leaders to have experienced IP first-hand. IP Missionaries must also have pedagogic skills so as to lead the activity naturally and attract children's attention.

Schools have tried different kinds of leaders: Jesuits, catechists, teachers, parents (recommended) and third and fourth year students. In our experience, fifteen-year-old students are ready to lead their classmates' prayer without problems.

When the experience was first launched at Inmaculada School, some parents were invited to participate in this activity. Many accepted the invitation and took advantage of the opportunity to educate their children in the knowledge of God.

The first parents to accept the invitation were silent witnesses for a long time of the prayer led by a Jesuit and in this way, they learned how to do it. Throughout the time, they have gained a lot of experience and now they can train "new parents", thus guaranteeing the project continuity as well as new leaders' formation. As new parents acquire experience, they turn into experienced parents, making this a virtuous cycle. Many of these "experienced parents" now participate in IP workshops in other schools and parochial churches.

"New parents' training" starts passively and may last for as long as a year and it consists in sitting at the back and watching "experienced parents" lead the prayer. Once new parents have gained experience and feel more confident, they are ready to take the plunge and lead. It is advisable for every missionary to do the SE.

Leaders will focus on external and internal aspects. Externally, they will ask the children to stand up, make silence, take a deep breath, share what they have imagined, etc.; internally, they will set in motion the SE triggers and invite the children to feel that God is looking at them lovingly, to imagine the Virgin, to tell Jesus something, etc. When external factors are controlled, it is easier for the children to deal with the internal aspects. But everything will ultimately depend on the leaders' charisma, the child's responsibility and the grace of God.

If leaders can sing well or play an instrument, so much the better!! If not, they can use recorded music.

It is advisable for a Jesuit to go to the prayer meetings from time to time to supervise and make a pedagogical assessment of the practice, so that it may be improved day after day.

b.5) Defining the Implementation Process

The School Board should devise a plan to define the IP time and frequency, themes and place. First, they must know the number of leaders available in order to see how many grades will implement the

practice. If the prayer is led by parents, it is advisable to have at the least two per grade, since they can cover each other if one is absent someday. If the prayer is led by catechists, they should see if they are prepared to lead the IP and if they are truly convinced.

The ideal is to start with the first grades and incorporate the rest gradually year after year. More leaders should be incorporated and trained yearly, so as to ensure that every course that has started IP will continue the following year.

If the practice is simultaneously launched in several grades and the path chosen is to follow the SE itinerary, all the groups should start with Principle and Foundation (the guides for 1st grade), and the language should be adapted to children's age. The following year, all the groups will continue with the guides for 2nd grade (the hidden life), except for the 1st grade students who will start with Principle and Foundation. In this way, they will cover little by little each and every SE theme.

Some schools have designed a "quick implementation plan" to be fulfilled in three years' time. The first year they launch IP in first and fourth grades in primary school, and first and fourth year in high school. In this way, in three years, all the groups have incorporated IP.

When students get to high school, we must use our imagination so as to hold their interest. Although you will just find the guides for primary school grades in this handbook, we have included some useful advice to hold adolescents' attention and interest, such as:

- Find a leader or a catechist with whom the students have developed a good rapport;
- Relax the ceremony of getting into the chapel without losing the atmosphere of silence and concentration;
- Devote more time to silent praying; in some cases silence may extend up to five minutes (in primary school this rarely exceeds one minute);
- Search for themes in connection with students' experiences and needs;
- Once in fourth year, invite students to lead the prayer.

c) Evaluating learnings

Evaluating spiritual or religious learnings may be a challenge because this is the realm of the sacred, which is linked to our intimate conscience.

However, St. Ignatius always recommends us to evaluate and review our experiences. In the SE, he recommends to review each prayer, and also to review you day in general twice, once at midday and once at night.

But to be able to evaluate something, first we must define the skills or learnings expected, and respect the pace at which every person learns. In this case, the learnings to be assessed are quite complex and are intimately connected to the mysterious relation between man's freedom and grace.

The ideal would be to design a learning or skill acquisition process that includes indicators such as:

1. developing an inclination towards IP;
2. incorporating IP steps naturally;
3. praying not only at school but in everyday life;
4. learning how to lead the IP;
5. being able to write a guide based on any bible text.

Colegio Inmaculada has skill assessment indicators for the spiritual and religious dimension, and IP is no exception. How can we assess a child's capacity to incorporate the Ignatian method? Although this assessment should be personal, self-made, the IP leader or the teacher has certain clues that evidence that a child has started to internalize the methodology, namely:

- Externally, through gestures such as: the position adopted to pray, the capacity to close their eyes and quiet their bodies, the attention paid to classmates when it comes to sharing what they have imagined, feelings of serenity and joy evidenced during the prayer.
- Internally, through attitudes such as: coherence, pertinent comments, originality, the ability to relate what they have contemplated to other gospel scenes and their own lives. Sometimes when children speak, you clearly realize that it is the Spirit who has inspired those words.

This should be a self-assessment process in which students, assisted by their tutors, make a retrospective analysis, reflect on their practice; and aware of the importance of praying and having a relationship with God, assess their evolution and growth.

For IP leaders this is a very valuable practice that helps them realize those aspects that should be reinforced, and those that should be improved or changed.

Ignatian Prayer Steps

The following texts are just the result of trial and error, of trying new things to find the best way to engage in deep contact with God. Every IP workshop, every IP missionaries' meeting, every prayer, has proved enriching thanks to the valuable contributions made by attendees, teachers, catechists, parents and Jesuits.

In the SE book, Saint Ignatius speaks about the "additions", that is to say pieces of advice for getting the most out of every prayer and situation that may arise during the exercises. These additions are based on his personal praying experience, where he weighted what helped him the most and the least.

The following paragraphs should be read as if they were additions, that is to say some pieces of advice shaped by experience, that adapt the SE characteristics to the needs of young children and adolescents. Most surely, each leader will incorporate to the practice its personal traits in the way he/she "handles" the group, communicates with the children, uses the resources he/she has to help students do spiritual exercises and work on their inner self to cultivate communion with God.

1. At the chapel door

It is advisable to take into account the activity the students were engaged in before coming to the chapel because it may have had a positive or negative impact on their mood. Maybe they were in the break or come from a gym class and they are agitated, or maybe they had a stimulant and interesting class, or a negative experience which made them depressed and angered.

Before getting into the chapel, we must help them focus on what they are about to do. There are some external resources, for example, you can ask them about the game they played during the break or the class they had. Speaking about these things makes it easier for them to relax and calm down. You can also sing a song or ask them to take a deep breath and "silence their body", or make them stand in line, etc.

And, there are internal resources which are inherent to IP, for example you can tell them that they are about to meet the “person who loves them the most in the whole universe”, God, who is waiting for them; Jesus, their best friend ever, etc. You can also make them the two questions suggested by Saint Ignatius: where am I going? And, What for? (Cfr. SE 131). These two questions are very useful in general.

In this superficial and ephemeral world, in this culture of impatience and instant gratification, delving into the depth of your soul is truly a countercultural conduct that goes beyond the realm of religion, because it exercises intellectual skills and processes long neglected by society. IP is all about this capacity to get focused.

It is important to expressly make it clear that we are going to a special place, where we must have a respectful and loving behavior because we are going to meet with Jesus.

You can also ask them the following question: What is the first thing you do when you arrive at someone’s home? They usually answer that they say hello. So you can invite them to think about the best way to say hello to Jesus when they kneel and cross themselves before the tabernacle.

Another option is to tell them that St. Ignatius was a knight who admired and respected highly his king; so you can tell the kids to become knights just like St. Ignatius and pay their respect to the Lord, The King! The leader should say: “Now you will come in, two by two, and kneel like knights before the Lord and make an ample sign of the cross, slowly (the leader shows them how); and in the silence of your heart, you will say hello to Jesus- because He can hear you- and then sit and wait until the rest comes in and sits.

In the case of secondary school boys, they can come into the chapel altogether because they have already incorporated this greeting mechanism. But it is always important to make a stop at the threshold to think and focus on what they are about to do.

In the chapel

Once in the chapel, the kids sit in pews surrounding a carpet. Everybody must sit quietly, with their feet on the floor, and be able to see each other. The leader gives them directions to silence their body and calm down.

These directions are:

- * Take a deep breath, or
- * Listen to the external noises and then, focus on internal sounds such as your heart beat or your breathing rhythm, or
- * Close your eyes and relax, first the feet (make a pause), now your knees (make a pause), your waist, your arms, your head until you reach your heart, where Jesus lives.

2- Presence of God

When everybody has sat and is calm, you can start singing a song. If the leader cannot sing, recorded music may be used.

The leader should look at the crucifix and insist that the children do the same, especially during the first meetings, until they get used to it.

The leader can say:

Leader: When we speak to a person, what do we generally do with our eyes?

Children: We look into the other person's eye...

Leader: When we come to the chapel, we should also look at Jesus (the leader looks at the crucifix).

Another option is to tell them to close their eyes.

Leader: Can you see Jesus even if your eyes are closed?

Children: Yes (let them answer spontaneously).

Leader: Sometimes it is very helpful to close our physical eyes and open our spiritual eyes to see Jesus better.

To become aware of God's presence, St. Ignatius suggests staying in silence and considering "how God looks at us" (SE75). It is important to make a stop and experience this and realize that it is a gift from God, and not something that you can achieve at will. When you become aware of God's look, you are already praying.

The leader should make it clear that God's look is not an admonitory look which pays attention to our sins (Lk 15, 20), but a look filled with love and compassion, a look that heals, that makes you feel good, that purifies you from your selfishness, because it is the look of a Father who is good to all, "the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5. 45-48) and who preaches unity, fraternity and commitment.

Although St. Ignatius says that this step should last as long as an Our Father, we suggest prolonging this silence¹ as much as possible.

2- History: Reading the Word of God (Cfr. SE 102)

After we make silence to become aware of the presence of God, a passage from the Bible is read. St. Ignatius says that this is the way by which "we bring to memory the story which we are about to contemplate" (SE 102).

When the story that we are about to contemplate is related to previous prayers, it may be useful to make questions about those previous prayers as a way of introduction to the new prayer. On other occasions, it is advisable to start reading the passage straight away after the presence of God step.

Before reading the Bible, we should tell the children to adopt a respectful posture because this is a sacred text, and to pay attention because it is God who is going to speak.

¹ Silence is the realm of the Word, where we meet God in depth. Making silence is more than just not speaking; it is an existential attitude by which we silence our "whimsical noises" and let God pronounce our name to create and save us. Silence is a countercultural value because at present the world's culture fills us with superficial noises, invites us to keep up appearances, whereas silence leads us to know our inner self. It is important to stretch the periods of silence so that children can have the chance of meeting God genuinely and of growing in wisdom.

While reading, you can dramatize the story a little bit to facilitate comprehension. If there is a difficult term, you can make interrupt the reading and clarify the term (for example, you can say that a drachma is a coin, etc.). Some Bible texts are abridged just for the sake of making them easier for the children, for example in the text where Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, the dialogue between Peter and Jesus is omitted.

These are some of the options at the leader's disposal, to see which works better:

* Reading the passage from the Bible and not from this handbook: this simple act may suggest that the Word of God is in a Book.

* After reading, the leader may say: "This is the Gospel of God" or "This is the gospel of the Lord" and children can say like in Mass "Praise to You, O Christ".

* Is it better for the children to listen to the Gospel reading or to have a copy and read by themselves? Each leader will try and decide what works best for their group: when children read by themselves they get familiarized with the word of God, but it is also true that "faith comes from hearing the message" (Romans 10, 17) and the history of salvation was written to be told.

* Who should read the Gospel, the leader or the children? Both, children may read as long as they read clearly. Having a responsibility like this may help them focus and pay more attention.

* In an Ignatian Prayer Workshop, a leader shared the following experience: "I ask a child to read and after I ask him/her to retell what he/she has read. The following meeting, I ask a child to read, but this time I ask one of his/her classmates to retell what has been read. In this way, children are always focused since they know that anyone could be asked to retell what has been read".

3. Petition (Cfr. SE 104)

After the first two steps (Presence of God and the History) comes the petition. St. Ignatius says that we should make the petition which corresponds to the second week of the Spiritual Exercises: "inner knowledge of the Lord... to love Him more deeply... and follow Him more nearly" (SE 104).

This petition has three important verbs - KNOW, LOVE AND FOLLOW – and may adopt different versions:

a) The leader may use the original petition, divide it in chunks and ask the children to repeat it after him/her. In this way, children will learn this petition by heart just like they have learnt other prayers like the Our Father. For example:

Leader:

- Lord, may I **know** you more clearly (Children repeat)

- so as to **love** you more deeply (Children repeat)

- and thus **follow** you more nearly (Children repeat).

b) Another option is to unfold the meaning of the petition using our own words. Once again the leader speaks first and children repeat after him/her. For example:

Leader:

- Jesus, may I **know** you more clearly (Children repeat), learn how you live (Children repeat), what you think (Children repeat), what you do (Children repeat), why you do that (Children repeat), what you

feel (Children repeat). [Here you can also include something related to the text you are going to pray with, for example: why you got incarnated in Virgin Mary's womb, why you cured the blind man, etc.].

- to **love** you more deeply (Children repeat), or to love you more and more every day (Children repeat), or to love you more (Children repeat).

- and **follow** you more nearly (Children repeat), or be a better friend of yours (Children repeat), or be more like you (Children repeat), or feel the way you feel (Children repeat), or behave more like you (Children repeat), or tune in to your preferences or your living style (Children repeat), or be more committed to my neighbor, etc.

c) When children get more used to this praying style and have already incorporated the three verbs – know, love, follow – you may try this:

c1) Invite them to internally ask the Lord to help them know Him more clearly, and then make pause; then, invite them to internally ask the Lord to help them love Him more deeply, and then make another pause; and finally to follow Him more nearly.

C2) Invite them to make the petition internally on their own.

You may wonder: why is it necessary to make a petition when God already knows what we need before we ask Him? First because in this way we have much greater awareness that the fruits of prayer are a gift from God, and that we cannot attain them by means of our "intelligence or kindness" (Matthew 11,27). Sometimes we feel dry and empty, what Ignatius calls desolation, it is the way in which God makes us understand that inner knowledge of Him cannot be attained through human means or as a result of human merits (crf. rule of discernment number 9 for the first week of SE 322).

Besides, the Holy Fathers advise us to pray and ask because this makes our hearts readier to receive. "Exercise our desire through our prayers, so that we may be able to receive what He is preparing to give us", says St. Augustine. God really longs to become our friend; so the deeper the desire, the more willing we are to let God reveal his Presence and act on us. Thus, the more we make the petition, the more we focus on getting that particular gift.

It is a very consoling thought to imagine that God cannot resist giving a child what he has been praying for throughout their school life: to know Him more clearly, love Him more deeply and follow Him more nearly. This petition represents the hidden syllabus of an Ignatian school.

We should insistently pray that our school communities follow God more nearly so that they get more committed to their neighbor; in this way, we will also incorporate a factor which is beyond our control and which is so important to our educational work: God's grace, God's gift.

This petition also sums up the goals of any Christian's life, it is a living style that inspired and consumed the life of Ignatius, who was "crazy for God".

4- Contemplation (Cfr. SE 106-108)

St. Ignatius called the three previous steps (Presence of God, the reading of the History and the Petition) the preambles, because they prepare us for the contemplation. If we used the analogy of the banquet, the preambles would represent the appetizer.

Contemplation is the main course, where we delve into the mystery, we experience God first hand before getting to the Colloquy, which is the culmination, where we talk to God like two friends talk to each other.

In this stage, St. Ignatius invites us to focus on a scene and “see the people”, “hear what they say, see what they do” “as if we were present there” in order to achieve this inner knowledge.

In each prayer guide, the scene for contemplation is divided into three or four sub-scenes, and each sub-scene is divided into two parts: 1) illumination: where children analyze and retell the story in their own words, and where different aspects about the culture or the times of Jesus are explained so that children can understand the text fully and make the most of it; and 2) contemplation: where children are invited to “imagine”.

These “imagine” moments are a real challenge, because they are aimed at helping the children get immersed in the scene the best they could, so that they get to know the Lord more clearly. These “imagine moments” should engender, inspire emotions, feelings because it is through love and affection that we get to know someone.

During contemplation, children are invited to imagine the scene in as much detail as possible; this is a complex intellectual process which involves memory, will, affectivity, imagination, etc., that is the whole inner universe of a person.

After every “imagine” moment, there should follow a period of silence where children close their eyes to imagine what a place or a person looked like (SE 112); or what a character was doing in a particular moment, or how they felt before Jesus, or what Jesus meant when he said this or that, or the way in which Jesus looked at the sick, or any other aspect of the scene. To put it in a nutshell, see things as in a movie.

St. Ignatius instructed the use of the “as if present” tool, which means putting yourself in somebody’s shoes (whether they are apostles, sick people, etc.) and interacting with God face to face. Because imaging what Jesus felt or what he would do in a particular situation may help us feel the mystery more vividly as we are no longer mere spectators but active protagonists, who are addressed, looked at, enlightened by the Lord first hand. Because feeling that He has done something/suffered “all for me” (Cfr. SE 116) leads us to wonder “what should I do?” (SE 53), leads us to make a decision, commit ourselves and give an answer.

It is also useful to reflect on what is being said (SE 115), the dialogues, the meaning of the words, the verbs (SE 116). Sometimes repeating a phrase as if the Lord were telling this to us may help us gain awareness of his will. It is a way of bringing Jesus or his Mother back to our school or home life.

“Closing our eyes” during contemplation is important because it is proof of our capacity to control our body; it may seem simple but children find it very difficult and this deserves our full attention. If they do not close their eyes, it will be very hard for them – impossible I dare say – to meditate on the biblical scenes the way St. Ignatius did. When the kids succeed in keeping their eyes closed during contemplation, they should be expressly congratulated so that this may set the example to others; and when a child finds this difficult, he/she should be helped and not ignored. Take the time it is necessary to help them get used to closing their eyes, make it a habit.

In the prayer guides, there are many “imagine” proposals; however, as the leader learns and starts to master the methodology, they can introduce their own “imagine” proposals. In fact, leaders may change, add or discard elements in the guides according to the needs of the group, the goal is to help children understand and do the spiritual exercises.

For how long should the children remain with their eyes closed? For as long as possible, but this will depend on each group. This is a time for making inner silence (which has nothing to do with reaching

mind-blanking or nirvana) and for letting the history of salvation get to the bottom of our souls, to be created and recreated by the living word of God.

As regards small children, who can remain focused and in silence for shorter periods, it is useful to divide the scene into several contemplation moments and then after a little while in silence, invite them to share what they have imagined. With older children, the scene can be divided into fewer contemplation moments where children remain with their eyes closed for longer periods while the leader performs a guided meditation; for example, after the “composition of place” (as instructed by St. Ignatius) children quiet their bodies and close their eyes, and meanwhile the leader introduces very simple and short directions followed by a long silence for the children to imagine. The period of silence should last until the children start moving, which is a sign that their concentration capacity is over. At that point, the leader asks them to open their eyes and start sharing in turn what they have imagined.

The aim here is not to find the moral of the story but to have a first-hand experience of God (Cfr. GE 36-62). Conversion results from a heart filled with love, not with rational and well-meaning decisions. The fruits of conversion are to become Jesus’ best friend, to “follow Him more nearly” (Cfr. SE 104) and “serve” Him. And you only follow who you love, and you cannot love someone you do not know. In this way, conversion will come naturally; and wishing to be with Him and think and live like Him will be regarded as a gift.

Human beings are shaped by stories, from fairy tales and regional, national and international classics to family stories that have helped build their psyche. All this has created a deep worldview that impacts on the direction of our life. By practicing the Ignatian prayer, as a way of constant contemplation of the different moments in Jesus’ life, will we internalize evangelical criteria and structure our inner being from the perspective of the Creator. Thus, the Ignatian prayer is not a question of rationalizing lifestyles but of filling our hearts and memories with the wonders God performed in the history of mankind through his Son. And little by little, we will adopt the humble and unpretentious attitude that permeated every aspect of Jesus’ life, from the place He was born, grew and lived to the way in which he fulfilled his mission, etc. Thus, a continuous, close relationship with God will strengthen our love for Him and will lead us to a true conversion process.

Sharing what they have imagined

When children share what they have imagined, it is advisable to praise them for their contribution which, in general, is very valuable, precise and profound. Only in very few cases, they may make a mistake, for example if somebody says that an apostle called Jesus by phone, you may say: “But how come.... Did phones exist in the times of Jesus?” In that way, they can correct themselves.

Children have a fertile imagination and God incarnates in their imagination; that is to say, people’s lives, their relationship with their parents, their personal feelings somehow and unconsciously influence the way in which they imagine things. But as God speaks through diverse means, we cannot fully understand how and why they have imagined such things.

We should also bear in mind that there is a huge difference between what children could imagine and what they could verbalize with their limited vocabulary; that is, sometimes words cannot really transmit what they have really spiritually experienced.

When sharing, some children tell us their own experiences but some others repeat what their classmates have said before. We may wonder why that is so. Maybe because they have imagined the same, maybe because of stereotypes, maybe because they have imagined things as they hear their classmates speak, or maybe because they feel that what their friend has said is the right thing to say.

Regardless of the reason, every comment should be appreciated. Children are truly sharing their feelings, even when they are repeating what others have said before; sometimes by repeating, they are internalizing these concepts.

While children are sharing what they have imagined, everybody must pay attention and listen. So, it is advisable for children to raise their hand before speaking to ensure they speak in orderly fashion. If children speak in a low voice, the leader may repeat his/her comments loudly so that everybody can hear.

Children should be encouraged to speak and share their inner feelings; this will prepare them for their future life as wives/husbands, workers, members of society, etc. A person who can share his/her feelings is most likely to engage in healthy and positive relationships. That is why children should be gently but firmly encouraged to share what they have imagined, no matter how shy they may be.

Little children love sharing what they have imagined...always... but as they grow up, they find it more difficult and when they reach adolescence, different strategies should be tried to encourage them to share, and one of them may be to emphasize the importance of trusting one another. Another strategy is to ask a child what he/she has imagined (that's the reason why it is useful to know the names of the children); and another option is to tell the children that everybody is going to share their experience in turns starting by the one sitting at one end of the row, in that case every child is allowed to say "sorry I couldn't imagine anything".

This step prepares the children for the Colloquy, where they speak to the Lord, get in contact with the mystery, and give Him an answer as a result of what they imagined while contemplating the scene as if they had been present (Cfr. John 1, 1-4).

5- **Colloquy (Cfr. SE 54)**

Now, children sit on the carpet in front of the tabernacle. This carpet represents the Promised Land, the Heart of Jesus, a meeting point where to be close to Jesus.

There they are invited to resume what they have imagined, delve into it even further, and speak to Him (SE 54). For example, if they have prayed with the Annunciation, they are encouraged to place their hands on Virgin Mary's belly, where Jesus is incarnated, and tell Her or Jesus, or God the Father or even St. Joseph something nice. If they have contemplated the Birth of Jesus, they may take baby Jesus in their arms and talk to Him or just look at Him, or hold Him close to their hearts or touch His "clean and immaculate flesh". If they have contemplated the cure of the leper, they may let Jesus touch their heart with his hand, the same hand that cured the leper. In short, something simple to focus on God, to experience His presence first hand and to talk to Him.

During the colloquy children are advised to use what St. Ignatius called "application of the senses", that is see Him with our imagination, taste His sweetness, hear His preaching, etc. (Cfr. SE 121-125). Unlike adults, children find this very pleasant and easy. They are also encouraged to tell Jesus something or to let Jesus tell them something (perhaps the same phrase Jesus told the main character in the passage read, for example, "today I want to stay with you today", or "follow me" or "nothing is impossible with God").

They are encouraged to speak to God on familiar terms, as they have seen Jesus doing on many occasions while speaking to his Father, because that helps them understand that prayer takes place between two people who love each other. It is also very important to introduce the Trinity and propose meditations on the mysteries of Jesus' life where the presence of God and the Holy Spirit is essential.

Colloquy should last for as long as possible depending on the children's age. The time should be gradually stretched as they grow and mature. Colloquy may end with a song.

While children are still sitting on the carpet, they may be invited to ask or thank the Lord, or the Virgin Mary or the Father, etc. for something. For example: What would you like to tell Mary who has just had Jesus?

When praying, children usually look at the leader and say "I would like to ask Jesus..." as if the leader acted as a kind of go-between. Children should be encouraged to speak to Jesus or Mary directly by saying: "Jesus, I would like to ask you ..." or "Jesus, thank you for..." The leader may start or let the children start spontaneously when they are ready. In general, it doesn't take long and they usually pray for their families, sick relatives, pets or even a difficult situation the world is going through. Everybody should be given the chance to say their prayer, and participation should always be encouraged.

After this, they say the Our Father prayer (Cfr. SE 53) and, if they want, they may sing a song. Then they say goodbye to Jesus by kneeling and making the sign of the cross. Some kids like kissing their hand and then touching the tabernacle door or any statue of Jesus or the Virgin Mary in the chapel as a way of greeting the Lord or His holy Mother.

6- Examen or Review (Cfr. SE 77)

Once the children go out of the Chapel, they surround the leader who starts an examen of the prayer, just like St. Ignatius instructed in SE 77 "Now I will reflect on how I felt during the prayer". This is carried out simply by asking a few questions that children will answer in a loud voice and spontaneously.

Once during an Ignatian Prayer workshop, a catechist suggested the following: if in the petition we asked God to "know, love and follow Jesus", we should review our prayer from the perspective of these three topics. Along this line, we could make the children these three questions:

- 1- Did you get to know any new aspect of Jesus today, something that had never called your attention before?
- 2- When did you feel most love? When did you feel in consolation?
- 3- Did you feel that Jesus asked you to change something? Did you feel moved to do something, etc.?

This last question should not be answered in a loud voice.

Another simpler option may be to ask them what they liked the best and the least. They should be asked to mention one specific moment, they cannot just say "I liked everything" or "nothing".

The examen or review aims at helping the children reflect on the experience as a way of remembering, understanding and reformulating it, so that it may make a deep impression on them. In this way, children improve their knowledge of the prayer process.

Children may be invited to revive something they felt during this prayer, perhaps an image, during their prayer before they go to sleep at night. This may help them to delve deeper into their prayer at home, thus integrating all their spiritual experiences of God in their daily lives.

When saying goodbye, the leader may congratulate them on their behavior, or tell them that he/she is very happy because the prayer went on beautifully, etc. and add that Jesus must have been so happy to meet with them in the prayer.

Video

In this link, you will find a video about Ignatian Prayer.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=7t1AJ4WTUul

III. IGNATIAN PRAYER GUIDES

IGNATIAN PRAYER- GUIDE STEP BY STEP

STEPS	DESCRIPTION	OTHER COMMENTS
At the chapel door	First contact with the children: Check how they feel through questions, for example: What class do you come from? How was the break?, etc.; and then help them focus on what they are about to do, for example, by asking them: And now what are we going to do? Make these two questions: Where are we going? What for? Remind them that as they get into the chapel, they should greet Jesus and sit down.	Take deep breaths. Sing a song.
In the chapel	Calm and quiet the body: “Now let’s sit straight, our feet on the floor, and let’s calm and quiet our body... breath in and out slowly ...	Another option: “Close your eyes; focus on each part of the body, and relax... first your legs, then your arms, hands, heart, etc.” Or: “Let’s focus on external noises... now, let’s focus on internal rhythms; let’s see who can feel and hear their heart beats”.
Presence of God	God is looking at me: Look at the crucifix or close your eyes and say: “Let’s look at Jesus and feel He is also looking at me, his eyes filled with love because He is so happy to see us all here”.	Sing a song. Make a thanksgiving prayer and offer God this meeting.
History	Bible passage reading: The passage is read.	The leader may clarify and explain difficult terms or dramatize a part of the story.
Petition	Original petition divided in chunks, the leader speaks first, and then the children repeat. “Lord, may I know you more clearly, love you more deeply and follow you more nearly!”	Another option: Unfold the meaning of the petition. The leader speaks first and then the children repeat.

		<p>Another option: Remind the children of the three verbs (know- love- follow) and let them make the petition on their own in silence.</p>
Contemplation	<p>1- Illumination: Recreate the scene by means of questions that children will answer in orderly fashion. Implement the “as if present” tool and ask the children to imagine the place, the people, the situation, what they say and why they say it, why they do things, etc.</p>	<p>This step helps the children get ready for the next step.</p> <p>Remember, this is time for children to have a personal meeting with the Lord:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * It is not a Religion class; * they are not here to hear a sermon; * they are not here to find the moral of the story. <p>Conversion is in the hands of God and results from a heart filled with love for Jesus.</p>
Contemplation	<p>2- “Imagine” moments: Now, it is the time for the children to contemplate in silence. The “imagine” direction you give them should be clear and precise. a) The “imagine” direction can be given at the very beginning and then children close their eyes and imagine; or b) Children can close their eyes and the leader alternates some imagine directions with silences so that the children can imagine. In the guides silences and pauses are sometimes signaled by means of three dots (...)</p> <p>3- Sharing what they have imagined: Then, tell the children to open their eyes and ask them if they want to share what they have imagined. a) Let them speak freely without following a specific order, after they raise their hand; b) Call a specific child by his/her name and ask him/her if they want to share what they have imagined; c) Tell them that everybody is going to share what they have imagined and start with the child sitting at the far end of the row, and then ask one by one until the child on the other end of the row. (They should</p>	<p>Make sure everybody is sitting quietly before the “imagine” direction is given.</p> <p>Make sure children close their eyes.</p> <p>Work hard to help them express their inner feelings.</p>

	be allowed to say that they couldn't imagine anything).	
Colloquy	<p>Ask them to sit on the carpet, which represents the Promised Land, or Jesus' Heart; this is a meeting place where they get in close contact with God.</p> <p>Suggest some "action" related to the prayer so that children can interact with God/Jesus/the Virgin and engage into a personal and loving dialogue with Him... in silence, heart to heart.</p> <p>Invite them to make a request or a thanksgiving prayer in a loud voice. Encourage them to speak in first name terms, that is: "Jesus, I ask you ... Jesus, thank you..."</p> <p>End the meeting praying an Our Father.</p>	<p>Make sure everybody is sitting quietly.</p> <p>Make silence last long enough for them to engage in dialogue with God.</p> <p>At this point, children should not share what they have told God.</p> <p>Make the request and thanksgiving prayer in orderly fashion. Ask them to raise their hands before speaking. Tell them to speak to God directly, instead of saying "I want to ask Jesus ...", they should say "Jesus, please I ask you ...".</p> <p>Say goodbye and leave in orderly fashion.</p>
Examen At the chapel door	<p>Ask the children:</p> <p>1- Did you know/learn anything new about Jesus? Something you had not felt before?</p> <p>2- When did you feel most filled with love?</p> <p>3- Did you feel Jesus asking you to change something or do something different?</p>	<p>Another option: What did you like the most and the least? When did you feel the closest to Jesus?</p>
Farewell	Thank and congratulate the children and tell them that Jesus is very happy!	Invite them to remember what they have contemplated today when praying at home at night.