

Remarks by Joseph Ruggieri '69, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Good morning to all of you and thank you for joining us in this celebration of the feast of St. Ignatius. I especially would like to thank my fellow trustees who agreed to underwrite the cost of today's celebration and specifically Leo Carlin, Paul Geraghty, Joe McElwee, Jerry Maginnis, Bruce Crawley, Shelia Connor, Marianne Gordon and John Natale, not only for their financial support, but also for their attendance here today.

For those who don't know me, I am the newly named Chairman of the Board of Trustees of SJP. In preparation for today's remarks, it was suggested that I focus on my connection to the Prep as an alum, past parent, trustee and now Chairman, and how that all came about, in order to inspire/encourage your participation in our Strategic Plan Initiative. I have only been on the job for a few months, so that advice is certainly understandable and excusable but my story as newly appointed Chairman of the Board is not inspiring. In fact if you checked with any of my teachers at the Prep, especially my Freshman Homeroom teacher, 'DUMBFUNDED' would be a more likely descriptor.

Instead, I thought I'd inspire by referencing the meditations of St. Ignatius which is the source of the current initiative of the Board's adoption of the current strategic plan and illustrate, by three examples the impact of this initiative

Two years ago, the Board of Trustees undertook the task of self assessment of the Prep, and with the assistance of a consultant, along with input from all the various constituencies of the Prep, formulated a Strategic Plan for the Prep to follow for the next five to 10 years. The two key goals for the initial phase of this plan are: Increase diversity, from the student body, through the staff, faculty, administration, and into the Board itself; secondly, formulate & implement a professional development program to foster excellent Ignatian Educators. To accomplish these goals, the Board recognized that the crucial factor that would determine its success was the need to expand the Annual Fund, in order to provide the where-with-all to meet the needs of these initiatives. At the suggestion of our Principal, Mr. Michael Gomez, the plan was titled "GO FURTHER STILL," a phrase taken from one of Ignatius's meditations. Although the plan is a challenge to us on the Board, we the trustees, like Ignatius, hope to inspire and enlist you here today to join us in our attempt to conquer the specific challenges previously mentioned.

For most of us our Prep experience centered around AMDG: ALL FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD, which was a guiding principle St. Ignatius gave to his followers; that all they would accomplish, or strive for could not be grounded in personal fulfillment, but was to be done by and for the greater glory of God. Following Ignatius's exhortation, the Prep's strategic plan is its attempt to Go Further Still.

Just what does Go Further Still mean? Well as Fr. Bur mentioned, Ignatius was a soldier who had lofty aspirations that were to be realized by his hoped-for heroic exploits on the battlefield. Unfortunately, his plans were shattered by a cannonball to his leg. During his recovery from his

battle inflicted wound, he experienced a spiritual conversion. However, his conversion from a soldier in the service of the King of Spain, to a spiritual soldier in the service of our Heavenly Father, is couched in military analogies. It is from these reflections of Ignatius that we understand the term "Go Further Still."

"Those who desire to show greater devotion and to distinguish themselves in total service to their eternal King and universal Lord will not only offer their persons for the labor but go further still."

In another meditation, recruits imagine a king preparing for battle. His ambitions are not modest: "My will is to conquer the whole land of the infidels." He issues a call for followers: "Whoever wishes to come with me has to be content with the same food I eat. . . . So too each one must labor with me during the day, and keep watch in the night . . . so that later each may have a part with me in the victory, just as each has shared in the toil."

The meditation continues with "Christ the Eternal King" replacing the earthly king and waging a similarly ambitious spiritual battle. His cause is described as so worthwhile, so motivating, and so inspiring that "all those who have judgment and reason will offer themselves wholeheartedly for this labor." Well, actually, they'll do more than just offer themselves wholeheartedly. The meditation continues: "Those who desire . . . to distinguish themselves in total service [will] go further still."

The following three experiences of young men and their relationship to the Prep, hopefully will transform the abstract concepts of the strategic plan into an inspiring reality of what your generosity can accomplish!

One of the highlights of service on the Board is the annual spring presentation by soon to be graduating seniors to the Board whereby a couple of them share their reflections on their personal Prep experience. Two years ago, we heard from one such Prep Senior. He came to the meeting impeccably dressed, which was a marked departure from most others in three ways: first his pants had a crease that could cut paper, he also had on a sharp orange striped tie and thirdly his arm was in a sling. Since I knew the boy's dad, an Italian in the clothing business I was not surprised by his dress. The sling, however, was a mystery. He began by telling how he had grown up in a relatively affluent section of South Jersey, and followed his brother to the Prep. He recounted how from his freshman year his goal was to go to the University of Pennsylvania. To achieve that goal, his plan was to row at the Prep and make it onto the Lightweight 8 boat, which would get his admission ticket to Penn stamped. Academically he did all that was required to achieve his goal and crew would provide that something extra that would secure his spot at Penn. He then told how after three and a half years of 'busting it' in winter workouts and on the river, not only didn't he make it into the Lightweight 8 boat, HE WAS CUT FROM THE TEAM! He told of devastation; how he went home and went to bed and hoped he'd never wake up. How the following morning he had to drag himself out of bed and head to school, the dread of facing his friends who would have seen the 'cut list' posted and know of his plight. But a funny thing happened on his way up the front steps to the Prep- Brian

McCloskey '91 was waiting for him. Brian, the Assistant Rugby Coach, put his arm around the young man, told him he knew what happened. Brian then invited him to come to rugby practice that afternoon, reminding him that there are no cuts on the rugby team and suggested "why not kick back for your final couple of months at the Prep and have some fun?" The boy took him up on the invitation and had a blast...for two games until he separated his shoulder (hence the sling!) But he went on to say shortly after his injury he got his letter from Penn. A VERY THIN LETTER. For those of you who have lived the college admission experience, 'Thin is NOT GOOD'. Sure enough he opened it and confirmed that his dream of attending Penn would not become a reality. Although he was disappointed, he said he wasn't devastated like when he was cut from crew, because...THE DAY BEFORE, HE GOT A THICK ENVELOPE FROM PRINCETON WHERE HE WAS GOING TO MATRICULATE that fall! HENCE THE ORANGE STRIPPED TIE!

Aside from the feel good aspect of that story, what does this have to do with the strategic plan? Well, Brian is an example of an excellent Ignatian Educator. His actions are the epitome of 'cura personalis', that is at the heart of a Jesuit education. His example demonstrates the ideal of caring for the whole person with every student as a unique individual. That focus doesn't exist everywhere, nor does it exist by happenstance at SJP. It needs to be cultivated and cloned to everyone who interacts with the students. That in fact is happening at the Prep and the generosity of those contributing to the Annual Fund provides the means to support that initiative.

The second young man I'd like you to meet could be 'the Poster Boy' for the Diversity Initiative. This is a young man who grew up in one of the worst neighborhoods in North Phila., in what is an all too common reality.... No father, mother with substance abuse issues, older siblings who've dropped out of school and taken to life on the streets. By a stroke of luck he gets to attend a Charter School, whose basketball team practices at the Prep. While there, the coach sees something special in the boy, and through his relationship with Fr. Bur's predecessor, Fr. Byron, manages to get the boy admitted to the Prep and through the generosity of the Prep benefactors, the financial aid required. But the boy struggles with the rigors of the Prep, because of the absence of a strong academic foundation. He spends the summer of his sophomore year in summer school, but he does make it to junior year. But now difficulties at home threaten his ability to perform at the high level demanded of Prep students. He is given an assignment by his English teacher to write an essay around Christmas time that focused on what gifts he had received this season. I'd like to share his essay with you.

This past semester was by far my worst semester at the Prep. My grades were slipping, things were not going so well at home; things were just all discombobulated in my life. When I started to believe that all hope was gone, God sent me two angels to help me in the time of need.

My freshman and sophomore years were not that of greatness, but I did good enough to pass each year. Coming into my junior year I felt pretty confident because I would be the first of many to do so in my family. That confidence soon turned into fear when I realized the work load expected to be completed by a junior at The Prep. Everyone told me I could do it or I would not have made it to my junior year, everyone but the ones closest to me. All of my classmates were

completing their work without a complaint and I then realized that they all had the support of their families behind them. So I tried to thrive off the support I got from other people around me. It worked for when I was around them, but when I was to go home my family would constantly down me, almost making my worst nightmare come true; becoming a statistic. I honestly believed that my family did not want me to succeed but to join them as a drop-out. I would come home and not be able to get any homework done because of the amount of noise that my family all day long. When I asked for a little silence the noise just grew as if they did not care about my education at all. I began to pray every day to God and he kept telling me that everything would be okay and that everything would work out. I believed everything I heard to be true, and I let God take over my life.

A few weeks later an older but close friend of mine, Mr. D who is currently the Dean of Students at my grade school suggested that I get away from the noise of North Philadelphia, and escape to a quiet place where I could study and have the support of those around me. Not knowing that he had been talking to another older but close friend of mine, Mr. T who lived in a three bedroom home, with just his wife located in the New Jersey suburbs. The two then came up with a plan which had me staying at his house for a week. As soon as I was informed with this plan I immediately thanked God, for that was one of my prayers. Even though God answered my prayers, that surely was not the end of them. After that week, Mr. T asked me what I thought of the idea of making my stay there permanent, and without hesitation I said yes, but I knew my mother would disagree with this whole idea. So I procrastinated in telling her of the idea, something I should not have done for she is my one and only mother. When I broke the news to her that Monday morning, December 21, 2009, she immediately said no to me, but after a long conversation with my two friends she was persuaded to let me stay.

Mr. T and his wife Mrs. Lisa have welcomed me into their family as if I was their own. They care for me and support me in all my decisions and I truly appreciate everything they have done for me the time I have been living under their roof. With all the room, quietness, and opportunity I now have, I feel confident that I will graduate from St. Joseph's Preparatory School and go on to college, something I was not too confident about when I was staying with my family.

The thing I'm most thankful for is that I not only witnessed a miracle but I was given a miracle directly from God. I can now continue my school year knowing that I have the support of those around me all the time and I do not have to hesitate to ask them for anything because I know they are willing to help me with anything. Thank you God for this miracle and for the great positive people you have placed around me.

Unfortunately as inspiring as that is, it was not all "happily ever after" for him. He comes into senior year and the pressures of the college admission process along with the thought of leaving the security of the Prep begin to weigh heavily on him. He talks about quitting, going back home and living life in the "hood." He thinks that maybe that is just his fate. However whether by coincidence, luck or perhaps 'Ignatian Intervention', he goes on his Kairos retreat and is assigned Bro. Carson as his faculty leader. Now Br. Carson had just returned to the Prep after a nearly 40-year absence doing other various ministries. The young man opens up to Bro.

Carson, who listens attentively, then begins to tell this young man about another boy he knew when he was at the Prep 40 years ago. That young man, from South Philadelphia, followed a very similar path to the Prep and recounts some of the struggles that that boy encountered during his time at the Prep. Coincidentally, in that boy's senior year he had similar doubts and decided to quit the Prep. He even called his mother and told her to sign him up at either Neumann or Southern. Bro. Carson talked him back off that ledge and developed a lifelong friendship with that boy. He introduced this young man to him and this young man now has another mentor/angel, who just so happens to be a current SJP trustee.

While our diversity initiative has been successful in making the Prep available to some, we need to Go Further Still as a Board that is ever aware of the Mission of the institution it is stewarding we have a responsibility to ensure that we provide the means to carry out that mission. The Prep Fund is the way that we fulfill our responsibility.

The final story that completes 'my pitch ' to you, involves a young man whose Prep experience isn't complete. The final chapter has not yet been written. Perhaps with your help, it can be.

This boy comes from a typical middle class family. Both parents work. Father is an electrician who makes a decent living and provides for his family as best he can. They live in Havertown, but as the boy indicates in his letter, money is an issue, since he has three brothers and sisters, one of whom is in college.

Dear Sir,

I really liked St. Joe's Prep when I took the entrance exam. When I took the exam it was the first time I ever thought about going there. I also had a shadow day with one of the freshmen and got an overview of a whole day there. The shadow day changed my outlook of the school. On that day I felt at home in the school and the students and teachers couldn't be nicer.

Before this opportunity I knew I was going to Haverford High School, and I never thought I could go to such a prestigious high school as St. Joe's Prep. My parents work hard but with one brother and two sisters, one of whom is going to college, St. Joe's was not something we could afford. I know a lot of people are working hard for me to go to St. Joe's and I thank you all. It has been one of my dreams to go to Notre Dame for college and I think I can make this dream a reality if I attend St. Joe's and work really hard. St. Joe's Prep is a tremendous high school to attend. All of the kids I talked to said they loved it there. I know it will not be easy and I know I will be challenged. I will work to the fullest of my ability to earn this life changing opportunity. I am thankful to St. Joe's Prep for giving me this chance, and I am thankful to the generosity of those who are helping me to be a student at St. Joe's Prep.

The struggles and eventual victories over their personal challenges for these three young men are the essence of the Prep experience. In order for the Prep to be true to its Mission, all three must continue to be an integral part of the Prep. The Prep Fund can make it a reality! The call today from us, the trustees is for you to join in the challenge to Go Further Still!