

BOSTON COLLEGE

vocational discernment:

the courage to authentically
pursue your passion

MAKE *the* IMPOSSIBLE



POSSIBLE

*One Man's Crusade to
Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and
Achieve the Extraordinary*

BILL STRICKLAND
with VINCE RAUSE

*first year academic convocation
september 12, 2013
with an address by bill strickland*

go set the world aflame!



the jesuit mission

The Jesuits' "way of proceeding" and 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.

We are not solitary creatures. From the womb, we live in relationships with others, growing up in cultural, social, and political institutions that others, through the wisdom of their accumulated experience, have created for us. To be human is to find our place in these relationships and these institutions, to take responsibility for them, to contribute to nurturing and improving them, and to give something back to them. Jesuit tradition uses the Latin word *magis* or "more" to sum up this ideal, a life lived in response to the question: How can I be more, do more, give more? Having the courage to seek this wisdom is an important step in how we lead virtuous lives.

It is certainly the hope of Boston College, as a Jesuit, Catholic university, that students will feel at home here no matter what their background and beliefs. Each student is at Boston College because he or she belongs here, and this place is now and shall be part of his or her formation. From a multitude of experiences over the next four years, it is our hope that all students will grow in expanding their hearts and minds, enriching their souls, and developing their talents, so they will grow in wisdom, faith, and love. Boston College also desires that students will come to know more deeply God's profound and abiding love for them and for all men and women, and that all Boston College students will make their choices in light of that love from God.



THE PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

The goal of our life is to live with God forever.
God, who loves us, gave us life.
Our own response of love allows God's life
to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts of God,
presented to us so that we can know God more easily
and make a return of love more readily.
As a result, we appreciate and use these gifts of God
insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,
they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice
and are not bound by some obligation.
We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one.
For everything has the potential of calling forth in us
a deeper response to our life in God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this:
I want and I choose what better leads to deepening God's life in me.

From the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, paraphrased by David L. Fleming, S.J.

a way of proceeding in a jesuit university

Our perspective on the world affects our experience, and our experience becomes our sense of reality; therefore, this sense of reality influences how we interact with the world. If we see the world as a cynical or loving place, this perspective embodies and becomes our understanding of our surroundings. St. Ignatius of Loyola thought that the right vision comes from a trusting relationship with God who loves us.

To think about this relationship with a loving God is a spiritual, intellectual activity that we will ask all of our students to engage in as they embark on their individual and communal journeys here at Boston College. The choices and the decisions that we make through the course of our daily lives either draw us closer or move us further away from God. St. Ignatius of Loyola discovered God's love through his quest for self-knowledge and personal sacrifice.

Ignatius's own spiritual growth happened in response to a difficult and painful experience. In 1521 while defending the city of Pamplona against a French attack, a cannonball struck his leg, causing a severe injury. During his subsequent recuperation from two painful leg surgeries, Ignatius had a great deal of time to consider his life and what he truly wanted and desired. While recovering, Ignatius had access to only two books: the *Vita Christi* and the *Flos Sanctorum*. These literary works examined the life of Christ and the stories of the saints. From reading these two books, one of the things that Ignatius came to understand from his conversion was that he was created by God. This conversion made something stir within Ignatius's heart. This stirring inspired him to rethink his view of the world and of God. Ignatius realized that God created him for a purpose, as are all women and men.

This new orientation for his life and his new understanding of God provided Ignatius with **a more authentic understanding of reality**, which gave him a new vision of himself. Ignatius's vision of God was very tangible and personal. He had seen and experienced God in such a profound way that he was now able to truly find God in all places and in all things. This experience St. Ignatius describes in the Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*: "All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily."

When we understand that God is love, it is foundational for us to understand that God loves us completely and fully. In order to deepen our understanding of this, Ignatius asks each of us to reflect upon and contemplate God's love, which is the concluding prayer of the *Spiritual Exercises*. There is great value in reflecting upon all that we have within our lives: our family, friends, talents, and gifts. Through reflecting upon our experience, expressing gratitude, and having patience, we are better able to find and retain a perspective that helps us to shape and model our lives. In many ways, a Jesuit education helps to direct each of us to continuously listen to our own heart. Being in the habit of understanding and responding to our heart is how we become transformed and grow into people who we want to become and who we are meant to be.

As first-year students, you are embarking on a pilgrimage that has no set route but does have a clear destination. To be authentic pilgrims, each of you must engage in the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of the experience with an attentive, responsible, and loving heart. There are many roads and possibilities on this pilgrimage from which you must choose; however, to reach the destination, **you need to live authentically—you must live the life that dwells within you.** To reflect daily upon your authenticity enables you to discern the right direction to proceed. Like Ignatius, you make good decisions when you examine and attend to the relationships within your lives. This discernment needs to be at the heart of your decision-making.

finding god in all things

When St. Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus, he chose to create an order whose members would work wherever the Church and world most needed them. Ignatius was convinced that God deals directly with us in our experience. This conviction rested on his profound realization that God works in all things that exist; therefore, our intimate thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, and our responses to the people and things around us are not just the accidental ebb and flow of our inner lives, but rather the privileged moments through which God creates and sustains a unique relationship with each of us.

In finding God in all things, we discover sacred moments in everyday life; grace-filled opportunities to encounter God in nature, our relationships, our academic pursuits, our own stories, and in the stories of those around us. In these sacred moments, we realize our connectedness to God and how we are called to participate in the transformation of the world in both big ways and small.

As you begin your life at Boston College, we invite you to reflect upon your own experience of finding God in all things and to consider your individual desires by examining Bill Strickland's unwavering commitment to his vision and passion to reshape the Manchester community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as demonstrated in *Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary*. Before reading this work, please reflect upon the following prayer by the late Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Pedro Arrupe, S.J.:



*Nothing is more practical than finding God, that
is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final
way.*

*What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything. It will decide what will get you
out
of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings,
how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you
know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with
joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide
everything.*



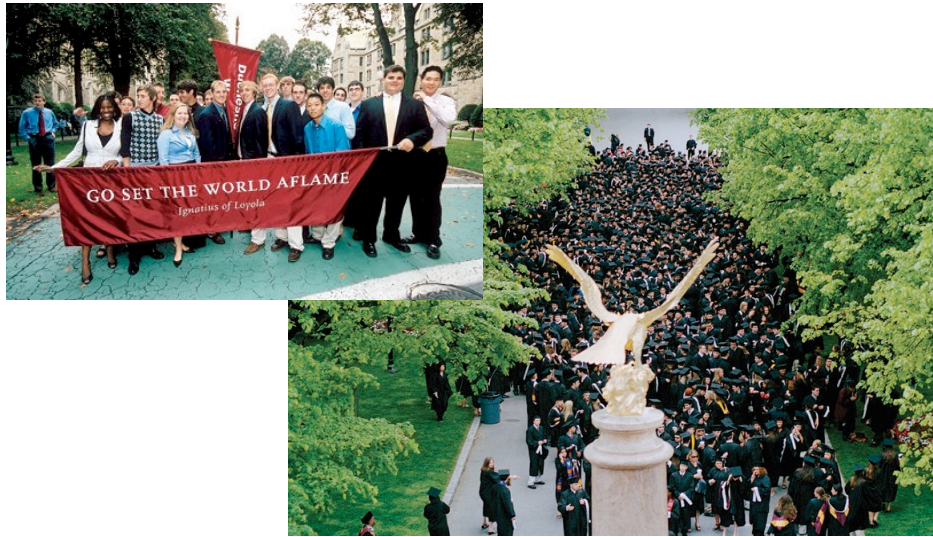
To ask the right questions is to begin to enter into the process of discernment, which needs to be at the heart of all of our decision-making. We would ask each of you to ponder these key questions:

**What stirs inside of you? What are
your deepest desires? Where do you
find God in your life?**



a history

The *First Year Academic Convocation* and *First Flight Procession* welcome each incoming class into the academic conversation already resounding through- out the Heights. The *First Flight Procession* that each student partakes in is an act of faith; faith that your classmates, the faculty, and the entire Boston College community will work together to engage a myriad of ideas that shapes your character, expands your intellect, and deepens your soul. As a student body, Jesuit community, and faculty collaboration, the event commissions all first-year students. In the same way that our freshman class is welcomed into the University, our seniors follow the same route on their commencement day, as they are set forth into the greater community of graduates, professionals, and alumni.



Convocation and Graduation Ceremonies on Linden Lane.

The *First Year Academic Convocation* looks to engage students intellectually, socially, and spiritually. As the tolling bells of Gasson Tower signal the start of the procession, the entire freshman class, gathered at residential halls, proceeds down Linden Lane. Each residential community arrives in front of Gasson Hall, the first building, built in 1913, on the Chestnut Hill campus. It is within this storied tower that the early Boston College students were asked to discover their own voices in what was originally called the Recitation Hall. As a committed community, we will empower each of you to discover and cultivate your own unique voice here on the Heights. To begin this pursuit, each first-year student is invoked by both a Jesuit and lay educator to “Go Set the World Aflame.” St. Ignatius gave this same charge in 1542 to St. Francis Xavier, who was carrying the Gospel to the East.

Traditions and rituals draw us into the experience of our lives. They also help us feel connected to something larger than ourselves. The *First Flight Procession*, the blessing, and the lighting of torches are all part of how we look to connect a 2,000-year-old Judeo-Christian tradition, a nearly 500-year-old Jesuit, Catholic order, and a 150-year-old institution, Boston College. As we feel part of something larger than ourselves, it is important to recognize the camaraderie and the companionship that we form among ourselves and how that connects to the alumni who have come before us. We also want each of you to come to realize that as members of the BC community, we believe in you. It is our hope that in the four years that pass between Convocation and Graduation, you will become attentive, intelligent, loving, and compassionate people who are committed to something greater than yourselves.

St. Ignatius attempted to model a life and provide a path alongside Jesus that would enable each of us to examine our lives in a tangible way to pursue the most profound questions. The Society of Jesus as well as the faculty, administrators, and staff are here to be your companions in contemplative action as you search for truths in your life and the world around you. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson asked the questions, “Who am I, and how do I fit into this world?” It is through many conversations at Boston College that you will begin to answer these major questions in your life.



Torch lighting during First Flight Procession.

Boston College hosts the *First Flight Procession* and the Convocation address on the same day as the Mass of the Holy Spirit. It is the Mass of the Holy Spirit that expresses most profoundly our connection to our mission. We ask that each of you begin to ponder how your personal faith and beliefs are developing. We would invite each of you, regardless of your personal religious beliefs, to be open to the gifts of God's grace, which St. Paul refers to as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. These fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As we begin each school year, we pray that the Holy Spirit continues to fill our hearts with the fire of God's love, which can better enable each of us to **"GO SET THE WORLD AFLAME."**



In the fall of 2012, Boston College began celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founding. This celebration began with a Mass at Fenway Park and continues into the fall semester of 2013. We would urge you to visit www.bc.edu/150 to learn more about the history of Boston College and the events that commemorate Boston College's sesquicentennial.



the book and its author

As the class of 2017, each of you will have the opportunity to read *Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary* and to welcome author Bill Strickland to Boston College to discuss his



work. Strickland's work recounts his life and his vision to inspire, instill hope, and renew. His writing explores entrepreneurship, community partnerships, civic engagement, social justice, the power of the arts, and the resiliency of the human spirit.

Bill Strickland is the president and CEO of Manchester Bidwell Corporation and its subsidiaries, Manchester Craftsmen's Guild (MCG) and Bidwell Training Center (BTC). Strickland is nationally recognized as a visionary leader who authentically delivers educational and cultural opportunities to students and adults within an organizational culture that fosters innovation, creativity, responsibility, and integrity.

Manchester Bidwell Corporation is a business model that works. The model works so well that Bill Strickland is replicating the Manchester Bidwell enterprise throughout the country. He has said, "If this country has a future, it's because of the ability to form visions and partnerships. I believe that we can change the United States of America in my lifetime."

Throughout Strickland's distinguished career, he has been honored with numerous prestigious awards for his contributions to the arts and the community, including the coveted MacArthur "Genius" award. He has dedicated the past several decades to maintaining successful relationships with prominent national foundations and political leaders who share his passion and vision for a better future.

a way to approach the text

As you enter into this Jesuit, Catholic university, we will ask each of you to engage in a conversation, to live together, and to share your life with one another. To prepare for this conversation, we ask that you read Bill Strickland's book as it will provide a way to think critically upon your own life experiences and the dreams that you have imagined. Through Strickland's writing, we learn about a man who overcame immense odds to actualize his "dream, which was based on nothing more substantial than a hunger for meaning and purpose" (p. 95). It is the hope of Boston College that you will use the life and writing of Bill Strickland as a source of inspiration as you define and pursue your own dreams.

By drawing upon a variety of experiences expressed in this book, Strickland describes his home of Manchester as a place where young people "were being destroyed by rage, drugs, violence, apathy, fear, despair, and all of the other devastating aspects of institutionalized poverty" (pp. 63-64). Through his journey and dedicated commitment to a larger vision, Strickland shares with the reader the ways in which he helps others to experience the same "magic" that he felt as he sculpted clay for the first time in high school. Strickland also details how through his committed vision for something greater, countless people have recognized talents and capabilities that they have never dreamed of before.

Strickland's creation of Manchester Bidwell creates a unique case study into how one person trusted his life and his life's work to "his unspoken intuition that the human spirit is remarkably resilient, and that even in damaged and disadvantaged people's lives, and in circumstances where the odds seem hopelessly stacked against you, there is endless potential waiting to be freed" (p. 9). Through his work within his home community, Strickland tackles societal problems that insidiously breed hopelessness, defeat, despair, and decay. His pioneering efforts in his neighborhood have provided a setting and a path that have allowed countless people to reject proscriptive and self-defeating assumptions by instilling confidence, cultivating passions, and redefining how people view life.

As you read *Make the Impossible Possible*, pay attention to Strickland's reflections about his life and his community, for it is through this contemplation that Strickland comes to articulate his path to a fulfilling life. Self-reflection helps each of us to gain insight on the forces that shape our lives by providing us with a way to articulate our deepest desires, which are our truest expressions of ourselves.

This awareness and keen perspective are found in times of stillness, which helps us to avoid self-defeating assumptions, placating facades, or societal constructed roles that people feel compelled to perform. When people engage in these fraudulent performances, these facades take them further away from the life that they were meant to live and the passions that they desire to pursue. To flourish as human beings, people need to pay attention to both the relationships in their lives and what they feel called to become in life. Identifying and embracing those areas that bring forth joy is at the heart of the journey and should guide vocational pursuits. Strickland's life has been defined by his pursuit of passion and commitment to a larger vision for greater good. By exploring our individual experiences and reflecting upon our interactions, we too can begin to translate meaning into action and live lives that are rooted in our deepest desires.

One of the pillars of a Jesuit, Catholic education is the idea of the *Magis*. *Magis* is derived from the Latin phrase *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—"for the greater glory of God." *Magis* is a central word in Ignatian spirituality that calls each of us to actively pursue the "more" or the "greater" in our lives; however, this *Magis* is not a quest for perfection or for superlatives but one of magnanimity and humility. Like Strickland and the community members of Manchester Bidwell, we too need to find and discover our passions and actively engage them. Discovering and falling in love with one's deepest passion is a key goal that Boston College has for each of its students. As you find yourself here at Boston College, we will ask each of you to discover and pursue your "more."

The Jesuit tradition encourages each person to strive to do great things for God, which requires one to search out his or her deepest desires and reflect upon them. The *Magis* is not possible if there is not sensitivity or awareness to what stirs one's heart. Understanding the *Magis* often appears with clarity during the discernment process, specifically when we are asked to choose which is greater. Strickland's life story presents many instances when he had to choose the greater good for both his community and ultimately himself. His unflagging pursuit of his passion and his ability to kindle passions in others provides a model from which we can learn. His writing calls for each of us to reflect upon our own passions and to follow them into lives that we were meant to live.

While reading Bill Strickland's work, pay attention to key moments that shaped and defined his life. We ask that you be attentive and reflective upon where you have been, so that you can better understand how you live in the present, which will ultimately help you to discern what you are called to do in the future.

While reading this work, we have provided some key questions for each of you to consider, for raising questions will draw you out of yourself and asking questions is at the heart of your journey:

“I had a more radical notion to share with them, a new definition of success, I wanted them to understand that success isn’t a destination... Success is something you assemble from components you discover in your soul and your imagination. Authentic success, the kind of success that will enrich your life and enlarge your spirit, the only kind of success that matters, comes from knowing and trusting the deepest aspirations of your heart” (pp. 11-12).

How do you define success and failure? How have you formed these definitions? Over the next four years, how do you hope to discover your heart’s aspirations?

“I have an unshakeable belief that each of us has not only the potential to live a rewarding and purposeful life but also the responsibility to do so” (p. 11).

What are the ideals that you believe in? How do you hope to capitalize and cultivate those beliefs while at Boston College?

“Working with clay is an enterprise that’s riddled with uncertainty and unfairness, and the failures can break your heart. But once in a while you reach into that kiln and pull out a piece of work that is everything that you hoped for. Those moments were what I lived for. They gave me a high that was better than anything the street could offer—the same rush of joy and amazement you feel when a prayer is answered or a dream comes true” (p. 45).

What brings you joy in your life? What skills, ideas, or dreams excite you and make you feel alive? How do you hope to pursue your passions at Boston College?

“Each of these small successes fed the feeling I had the first time I laid my hands on clay: that I was nourishing something basic in my spirit, that I was holding sheer potential in my hands. For the first time in my life, I found myself believing that something extraordinary was

within my grasp” (p. 42).

How have you come to recognize your gifts? How have you cultivated and fed your spirit throughout your life? Have you considered how you will nourish your spirit here at BC?

“That doesn’t mean that spending your life as a chef, or an artist, or an inner-city activist, for that matter, is morally superior to making a fortune on Wall Street. That’s not the point at all. It’s better to be an investment banker who lives her life with honesty and integrity, and in some way manages to make things a little better for the world around her, than to be, say, a teacher in some failing urban school who has no respect for the students she teaches and no faith in their potential to be anything more than they are. I’m often approached by idealistic young people on fire to do good for others, all hungry to save the world, I tell them the first step is save your- self” (p. 171).

How do you plan to use your education to pursue a life that makes you feel alive and on fire?

“I shared in conversations about art, jazz, politics, travel, philosophy, and good food. I learned a lot from the people I met there; I liked the way they listened when I talked, as if they were truly interested in what I had to say” (p. 49).

Boston College is filled with a variety of people and experiences that will spark enriching conversations. Who have been your best conversation partners in your life? How have they helped you to see the world in broader ways? What topics do you hope to discuss further here?

“Manchester Bidwell grew organically out my experience and my imagination. It was the unlikely, unforeseen, and, I would argue, inevitable result of my desperate use of a dream” (p. 101).

Ignatian spirituality emphasizes the power of imagination as a way to deepen one’s relationship with God, for it is through imaginative prayer that the truth of the heart is sought and emotions are stirred. It is through our imagination that we can often come to recognize God’s grace and the path to which we are being led. What are the dreams that you imagine for yourself? How does your prayer life strengthen your relationship with God and inform your

discernment?

“All of my life I’d been chasing after an intuition of what my life could be. I glimpsed it in the light at Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater. I sensed it in that sunny autumn afternoon in Ligonier. I bathed in it on sun-streaked afternoons in Buena Vista Street, where kids were working at the wheels and the place was filled with light and intense energy. But I discovered it in its most potent form in Frank Ross’s classroom” (p. 101).

There are moments of the divine that are ever present in our lives; how have you come to find God in the simple moments of your life? How have you come to be inspired in your lifetime within these moments?

“Accepting the notion that dreams can come true often requires heroic levels of courage and faith...in each of these cases, a human being is finding the strength and the optimism to throw off a lifetime of destructive assumptions and refusing to be limited by false ideas of what is possible and what is not” (p. 26).

How have you come to understand the social inequalities and destructive assumptions within our society? How do you intend to make a difference for and with those who feel marginalized in our society?

“I knew that identity isn’t something you inherit, it’s something you must discover. The Craftsmen’s Guild was helping me discover mine. Who was I? I was the guy who believed that art and creative experience are stronger than fear and ignorance” (p. 69).

What are the many facets of your personality? How has your identity been shaped? How have race, class, gender, schooling, family structure, and religious beliefs factored into how you have been formed? What parts of your identity have you yet to fully discover? How do you plan to explore those dimensions at Boston College?

“We’re surrounded by opportunities to enrich our lives with peak experiences. The best way to connect with these experiences, I think, is to pay close attention to those moments of magic in our lives...It may be a friend you are conversing with, or gardening in the backyard, or knitting a sweater, or reading a compelling book, or helping with your children’s homework... The point is, you’ll know what it is that is creating the sense

of flow. All you have to do is pay attention and let your senses draw you into the moment” (pp. 188-189).

These moments are experiences of transcendence, which is a way of describing moments in which a person encounters a Holy Mystery that provides communion beyond oneself and expands the understanding of self. When have you experienced transcendent moments and what did those encounters evoke in you?

“‘To find your mission in life,’ wrote author and Christian minister Fred Buechner, ‘is to discover the intersection between your heart’s gladness and the world’s deep hunger.’ For me that intersection defines the meaning of true success, which is, I believe, the point where your passions, values, talents, and dreams fall into alignment with genuine desire to make the world a better place to live for all of its inhabitants. The interesting thing about this definition is that it not only describes the condition of success, it tells you exactly what you need to achieve it. Against the backdrop of the materialistic, winner-take-all mentality that pervades so many of our lives, it may seem counterintuitive, even naïve, to believe that our own personal success can be enhanced by focusing on something other than competitive self-interest” (p. 226).

The word vocation is derived from the Latin word for voice, and it is our hope that you find your voice and your life’s calling while here at BC. Which of your passions links your heart and mind? Where does your heart’s gladness intersect with the world’s deep hunger, and how do you plan to seek this truth more fully at Boston College?



continuing the conversation

As you enter into this Jesuit, Catholic, liberal arts university, 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 the Jesuit community, faculty, staff, and administrators, who are here to aid you within this journey and quest for understanding. Boston College hopes that each student will deepen their individual faith over the course of their years here. There are a number of sacred places within our community where you can go to contemplate and recognize God in all things.



**We would encourage you to seek out
these sacred places on our campus:
www.bc.edu/prayermap.**

**We would ask that you begin this
path by reflecting on the following—**

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to
reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes. Now
she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face. Now she
snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day,” from *The Truro Bear and Other Adventures: Poems and Essays*. © Beacon Press, 2008.

Excerpt from *Thoughts in Solitude*, Part Two, Chapter 2

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

—Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*
© Abbey of Gethsemani

**What do you plan to do with the
opportunity that awaits you here at
Boston College?**



As you enter into your first year of college,

it is important to examine the decisions that you make while here at BC. Taking time to reflect upon your motivations, your desires, and your fears will give you a better perspective on your life—where you came from, where you are presently, and where you are heading. Boston College hopes to partner with you during this journey through the careful discernment of the intellectual, spiritual, and social components that affect you during your undergraduate journey.



Go Set the World Aflame!





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**conversations in the first year: a
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