

Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice Reflections

Teacher Reflection by Tommy Connors

I travelled to Washington in early November for the IFTJ with mixed feelings. First and foremost, being two days after the election that would change America this coming Friday, I had feelings of apprehension and nervousness. Regardless of your political views, a man who had the potential to instill fear and hate across 325 million people in one country alone would surely have an impact on a group of 14 from a windy Rock in the Atlantic Ocean. To go along with these feelings, I was truly nervous as this was my first voyage on behalf of the school that didn't involve a sports team. I had no idea what to expect- would I look out of place? Would I feel less than others who have been involved in the Jesuit world for much longer than I? Was I Catholic enough to fit in? Luckily the root of my nerves and my apprehension was quickly abolished by the emcee's opening statement that went something like this: "Regardless of your political views, race, gender or sexual orientation, we are all here for each other". The speaker went on to talk about the feelings of apprehension many people in that room were feeling two days post-election, about the many questions unspoken in the room – Will I be allowed to be who I am in the new Trump era? Will I be accepted in America? Will I look out of place? Knowing that many of the 1800 people in the ballroom that day had many of the same questions made me feel a little at ease, as well as a little bad. There I was worried about fitting in for a weekend event while many others there were worried about their safety. Some had previously declared their homosexuality to the world and in some cases were afraid for the lives they had tried to make for themselves while others who were transgendered were afraid of the backlash they might receive. Others still had no conceivable reason to be worried about their safety, but were scared for the country itself. Hearing these stories over the weekend really put my apprehension into perspective. It also made me think long and hard about St. Bon's and what it is striving to achieve in the world. Coming from a school whose mission statement involves a respectful, safe and caring environment in which we try to form men and women for others prepared me to take everything in and to attempt to do my best to instill the values I have learned at St. Bon's over the past 5 years to anyone needing someone to be there for them. In the end, I am to this day still reflecting on the meaning of that trip – working for the greater good is complicated and it requires that we sort through our own feelings and challenge ourselves to grow so that we can then be there for others who need us to be ready to act in the world, and to speak with those who voices might otherwise be silenced.

Student Reflection by Claire MacLeod '17

Over a five day period, eleven members of our senior class, including myself, and two teachers, were in Washington D.C for the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice 2016. Our journey began at around 3 AM on Friday the 11th and concluded on Tuesday the 15th. St. Bon's has sent delegations to this conference in the past and the reviews have been universally positive. That positivity carried into the attitudes of our current delegation as we departed for a trip we've eagerly awaited since the last delegation returned. However, unlike all other trips undertaken by St. Bon's, American politics dominated our conversation. As I'm sure everyone knows by now, in the wee hours of

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Wednesday morning, on November 9th, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States in the biggest political upheaval the country has seen since 1776. His controversial 16-month campaign ran on a platform of hateful rhetoric, fear mongering, and violence. Despite his sexist, racist, ableist, xenophobic comments, his alarmingly conservative Vice President, multiple bankruptcies, and court cases, Donald Trump now holds the highest office in the country. I, like half of the American population, struggle to find even a glimmer of hope for the next four years of the Trump Administration.

So how did the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, a conference geared towards discussion on social justice, mercy in action, and progressive Catholic values, address the election? Well, the discussions at the conference ranged from the election's impact on minorities, to the election's impact on the LGBT community, to the election's impact on the Church. In addition, the discussions and speakers were fantastic, especially our delegations' favourite, Father Boyle of Homeboy Industries. Fr. Boyle S.J. told students, "You're here these days so that you can stand against forgetting that we belong to each other...and pretty soon you cease to care whether anyone accuses you of wasting your time." Personally, I think this message created a theme well-suited for the conference. When you feel like your country is burning, time is precious. It takes an enormous, 2000-person effort to remind ourselves of what we, as Jesuits and Jesuit education students, believe in. But struggle to remember we must. The trip to Washington was a valuable experience in the struggle of memory against forgetting and I am happy that that struggle will continue next year, with the next delegation...