Chaplain Chats: Moments from the Heart

FROM: Sue Weitz Ph.D., Chaplain of JASPA, Gonzaga University
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The following was written by Peter B. Ely, S.J., Seattle University, 2009

A FIRE THAT KINDLES OTHER FIRES

The Society of Jesus has carried a flame for nearly five hundred years through innumerable social and cultural circumstances that have challenged it intensely to keep that flame alive and burning. Things are no different today. (35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, Document 2, 2008)

A FIRE THAT KINDLES OTHER FIRES

The Jesuits who founded Seattle University in 1891 believed that their educational mission continued the saving work of the Child whose birth we celebrate in a few days. He was the “fire that kindles other fires. He was” the “burning babe” Robert Southwell celebrates in his poem found at the end of this Newsletter. In the midst of his years of ministry, Jesus said, “I come to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled” (Lk 12:49). The Jesuit founders of the University kindled fires, as have the other Jesuits engaged in this educational work for over a hundred years, as have their colleagues from a variety of faiths. Education is the lighting of a fire. It is also a watering of tender shoots. The George Tsutakawa sculpture in the middle of the University Quad combines the features of water and fire as does Southwell when he speaks of the Babe, “Who, though scorched with excessive heat, such floods of tears did shed/ As though his floods should quench his flames, which with his tears were fed.” Organic growth requires not only fire but water.

The figure of the Child, “Emmanuel--God with us,” appeals far beyond the limits of Christian belief. For Christians, the Child Jesus represents God’s intention to save the human race through one of its own who was both the Son of Mary and the Son of God. Even beyond the Christian community, this Child has meaning as representing the extraordinary possibility that opens up, at least in principle, at the birth of each human being. And yet, for many around the world, the possibilities of human achievement are frustrated by an early death, even before birth, by disease or hunger, or war, or various kinds of oppression. Seattle University claims that its mission is to train leaders for a just and humane world. When our students return from immersion trips, we see the light in their eyes. Sometimes a moment of insight in a classroom will illuminate their faces.
Our alumni carry the flame with them and ignite other fires. This mission belongs to every level of the University’s organization and to all who make up its community. All light the fire. The Division of Mission and Ministry offers programs and events that highlight the mission and present opportunities to participate more deeply in the life of the Spirit that guides the University.