

*MAGIS IGNATIAN PROGRAMMES – GOOD NEWS FOR YOUNG ADULTS AROUND THE WORLD*

Since the late 90s, Jesuits and other Ignatian religious have been developing innovative programmes which ran in parallel with the Papal World Youth Days in various major cities. It was in 2005 that the name MAGiS was first used; it was used again at Sydney in 2008. The shape and content of these Ignatian programmes has evolved across these years and now, arising out of this process of development, local and national MAGiS projects have sprung up in many parts of the world. The latest stage in the growth of MAGiS is a major MAGiS programme currently being planned for East Africa in 2009, constructed by young adults themselves with the support of the Ignatian family and inviting young adults internationally.

These prior initiatives have included Loyola XXI in Paris in 1997, Horizon 2000 in Rome in the Jubilee Year, ANIA in 2002 at Toronto; and then MAGiS in Köln in 2005 and Sydney in 2008; all participating alongside the official World Youth Day programmes. At time of writing, it is hoped that a similar programme will be offered at the next WYD in Madrid in 2011. In some cases, established Ignatian young adult ministries helped to set up these projects; in others, stirring new possibilities for ministry have grown out of their success.

Now, at the beginning of 2009, we are witnessing exciting new developments in many parts of the world, as MAGiS projects and groups emerge, embracing the Ignatian methodology that is becoming established and, in a typically Ignatian way, adapting and modifying it to suit local circumstances and desires, people and places. The Ignatian family, which includes CLC, is responding to this new growth in various ways but it is clear that much of this growth is stimulated by the young adults themselves, often seeking to build on their lived experiences at one of the programmes at a WYD. At the same time there are others who, unable to make it to a WYD, have adopted the MAGiS way and are using it as they form new groups and develop new projects. It has become crystal-clear in the past year that MAGiS can operate independently of WYD and can be small or large, local or international, according to how the young people themselves are prompted by the Spirit.

What, then, is MAGiS and what has it become? MAGiS is a process, not a movement, a structure or a network; it's a way of doing things. It is a wonderful means of sharing Ignatian Spirituality with young adults who are thirsting for the insights it offers for their lives, for our world. In Germany in 2005 and in Australia in 2008, Jesuit Provinces and Ignatian partners came together to invite young adults to programmes of spirituality, service and companionship. Young adults came to both venues from many countries, participated in the MAGiS programmes and then went on to join many thousands of others at the World Youth Day celebrations with the Holy Father.

The MAGiS programme always centres on the "experiment" (placement) in which the participants undertake a work of service of, and encounter with, the poor, often with an element of engagement with another culture. At the heart of the MAGiS experiment is Ignatian reflection on experience, using tools such as the Examen and the MAGiS Circle. The most recent stage of its evolution, since MAGiS'08, is the emergence of MAGiS programmes and projects

organised separately from WYDs, inspired by the positive experiences of young adults in Sydney, Köln and at previous Ignatian events at earlier WYDs.

Typically, a MAGiS experiment involves these three elements: gathering, the service activity and reflection on experience. Young adults are called and gathered, then challenged to move into a new and unfamiliar place in order not only to serve the poor but also to find out what happens within themselves when they do so. The experience typically lasts for a week to ten days. There are five key moments in the MAGiS experiment day: a morning liturgy (the Eucharist where possible), a prayer-point for the day, given in the manner of the Exercises and accompanied by a Scriptural passage, the service activity throughout the day, then the MAGiS-Circle, in which the group members share and listen to each other's experiences, and finally the Examen, in which they (individually or communally) reflect prayerfully on the day just ending. The prayer-point, or *id quod volo*, of the day, is revisited at the end of the day to see exactly how God's grace has been at work throughout the day.

The MAGiS-Circle was often highlighted by young adults returning from MAGiS'08 in Australia and many groups meeting since Sydney have continued to practice it. It reflects aspects of CLC practice, engaging the "listening group" format rather than a discussion forum, in which each participant's sharing is listened to respectfully without interruption or interpretation, helping each person to grow in trusting awareness of God's presence and action in their daily experience. The overwhelming testimony of the young adults returning from MAGiS08 was of an enthusiastic acceptance of this way of doing things, and many reported a deepening sense of God's presence and call to growth, to each one.

The remarkable success of MAGiS'08, building on that of 2005 and previous events, now itself forms the basis for the next stage in the evolution of MAGiS. Fr.Ed Dooley SJ (ASL) and his team worked hard for over a year to provide a marvellous programme for over 1400 participants from over 40 countries. During MAGiS'08, the then Australian Provincial, Fr.Mark Raper SJ, convened a forum for all the national group leaders and challenged them to explore the possibilities for Ignatian young adult ministry that the Sydney experience suggested. Among the conversations that flowed from this forum were a series of discussions involving the E.African leaders together with some of their European counterparts. A strong desire to develop a MAGiS partnership for E.Africa began to emerge and soon, ideas surfaced about how this could be achieved. Allen Ottaro, a CLC member and student at Nairobi's Kenyatta University, proposed a MAGiS experience for E.Africa; Fr.Dave Stewart SJ, the leader of the British group, had already been exploring ways of engaging UK young adults in a partnership with the Jesuit work in Dodoma, Tanzania. Fr.Ludger Joos SJ, who had headed the MAGiS'05 project in Köln, and Sr.Mercy Thomas DHM, who had been involved in a growing MAGiS programme in Hungary, offered their experience. Ms.Elaine Rudolphi of the Jesuit European Office in Brussels added her expertise and so the idea came a reality – MAGiS'09, a programme for young adults based in Kenya and Tanzania, open to pilgrims from Africa and beyond. When the results of our discussion were announced by Allen to the whole of the MAGiS'08 pilgrimage – over 1400 people crammed into St.Mary's Jesuit Church in N.Sydney – at the end of our programme, the response was loud and long applause that took the newly founded core team by storm. If we didn't know before that point, we knew then that we'd agreed on something really important for our people, for their lives and for our world. MAGiS'09 was born.

Almost six months later, where do we stand? The International Core Team has been formed, convened by Fr.Dave Stewart SJ who is the Director of MAGiS-UK. A website has been launched, now featuring material to help people prepare spiritually for MAGiS'09. In Nairobi, an impressive operation has already begun work, including seven sub-committees charged with various aspects of the programme's preparation and delivery. This operation is hosted by Nairobi's Zaidi Centre, an Ignatian Spirituality ministry; its Director, Sr.Stephanie O'Brien IBVM, is a key member of the Team. Nine locations for the experiments have so far been identified, in Kenya and in Tanzania, with the additional possibility of one in Ethiopia; local preparatory groups are well established and making good progress. *"The project,"* says Allen Ottaro, *"will not only be a follow-up to MAGiS'08 but will also help strengthen an evolving MAGiS network in Africa and provide opportunities for young adult leadership, both here and the countries of our international pilgrim visitors"*. MAGiS'09 will be a great opportunity for East African young adults and for the Ignatian family, but there's an international dimension too. Fr.Dave is recruiting national and regional co-ordinators world-wide and issuing invitations through Jesuit Provinces. When MAGiS'09 is over, there will be in place a long-term project designed to promote, to E.African young adults, Ignatian spirituality, service of the poor and spiritual growth through prayerful reflection.

The main challenge for the Nairobi organising team remains *finance*. While local fundraising and participant fees will help to meet some of the costs, it is clear that outside funding will need to be sought to ensure the project's success. Every effort is being made to keep costs down but the high cost of transport within E.Africa, together with recent large increases in food prices in Kenya, will be a real challenge. A working figure of €500 per pilgrim (before travel & visa costs) has been proposed but we hope to reduce it so that young people from other parts of Africa and beyond might be able to enjoy this marvellous opportunity. Yet, despite the obstacle of high costs, we have already received initial registrations from several groups and individuals from various parts of the world. Fr.Dave Stewart SJ's advice to interested young adults, to leaders and to Provincials & Superiors is *"the "impact" experience is well worth the expense. We know that to be true; I have seen it with my own eyes in Sydney, and since. It's thrilling to see a new way of presenting the wisdom and insights of St.Ignatius being so eagerly received by so many young adults."*

MAGiS is emerging as a new and exciting way of sharing the insights of Ignatian Spirituality with young adults of today; the very people that the Church needs, yet to whom it often feels it cannot speak. As Fr.General Adolfo Nicolas SJ said in his message of welcome to the MAGiS'08 pilgrims, *"we are shaped by our encounters with one another and with our world in order to become something larger and more significant. We will bear the marks of Jesus's way."* We invite you to MAGiS'09 in East Africa, whether as a young adult pilgrim, as a religious in the Ignatian family, a Superior or Provincial, or as a supporter with finance or with your prayers. Let us work together, as friends in the Lord, that MAGiS'09 will be to the greater glory of God, and will reflect that glory, through these Ignatian young adults, to a world that so badly needs to receive it.

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