Jesuits: The men behind the collar
By Lauren Bogacz
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Last summer, theology student Ben Anderson was in northeastern India, traveling and visiting tea plantations where tribal groups still live in what he called slave-like conditions. A Catholic labor organizer traveling with him has spent his life working to improve the conditions of these plantations. He turned to Anderson and asked: “Why did God make the tea workers so poor and you in your country so rich?”

It was at this moment that Anderson felt like a Jesuit.

“I was standing at the foot of the cross with the forgotten of the world and trying to articulate with them God’s invitation for life,” said Anderson, 27, who is working toward a master’s degree in philosophy at Loyola.

With the upcoming celebration of Ignatian Heritage Week from Feb. 12-19, students should take the opportunity to learn more about the Jesuit lifestyle, said junior Sean Barry.

“I think Jesuit Heritage Week is important, because it reminds us all of the Jesuit institution and why we go to the university,” said Barry, who hopes to someday become a Jesuit himself. “This is time set aside for us all explicitly to understand the Jesuit charisms.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, underwent a spiritual conversion in 1522 and was inspired to devote his life to God. When the Society of Jesus was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540, the first Jesuits (including Ignatius) were officially ordained into the Catholic priesthood. Together, these men established the foundational values the Jesuits still practice today.

Those pursuing life as a Jesuit often have distinct inspirations and experiences that motivate them to devote their lives to God.

“I wanted to commit myself to something much larger than myself,” said Fr. Brendan Horan, S.J., who is a professor of political science and a special assistant to the Rev. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J. “The opportunity to live and work in a number of other countries and experience their diverse cultures has been a particular blessing.”

The steps to becoming a Jesuit are the same for every man interested in becoming one, and the process takes from nine to 12 years.

There are three stages that a man goes through in the process of becoming a Jesuit priest: the novitiate, the regency and theological studies. During this period, they are known as a scholastic.

The novitiate is a two-year period that emphasizes spiritual growth. It consists of a 30-day pilgrimage and a month-long silent retreat, part of the Spiritual Exercises written by St. Ignatius.
After novitiate, Jesuits take their perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The next three years are typically spent obtaining a master’s degree in philosophy.

The regency phase follows, which is usually spent teaching in a Jesuit high school. When this is finished, a person generally earns a master’s degree in divinity, which fulfills the requirements for priesthood. Many Jesuits later pursue a Ph.D. in a subject they’d like to teach.

For Fr. Michael Agliardo, S.J., the entire process includes an opportunity to increase awareness about the world.

“The formation process involves gaining an understanding of the world through exposure to other cultures and learning to look critically at your own,” said Agliardo, a sociology professor who spent time working with the poor in the Dominican Republic.

Fr. Charles Jurgensmeier, S.J., director of Loyola’s music program, remembers his own experience of becoming a Jesuit, which included many interviews, a physical and an appointment with a psychiatrist to make sure that he was “mentally fit” for the lifestyle.

The interview process is thorough, Jurgensmeier said, because the Jesuits want a complete picture of the applicant before he is admitted.

“They really get to know you, asking questions about your prayer life, how often you go to mass, about the faith itself and your relationship with Jesus,” he said. “They also asked about my family, schooling, health and background.”

Jesuits can do a variety of jobs, including but not limited to the fields of social work, education and helping at parishes and retreat houses, according to Agliardo, a sociology professor.

Many Jesuits work at Loyola, teaching and helping out at events on both the Lake Shore and Water Tower campuses. Not to mention, Loyola’s President the Rev. Michael J. Garanzini, S.J., is also a Jesuit. And because Loyola is a Jesuit Catholic university, its mission coincides with the five characteristics of a Jesuit education: commitment to excellence, faith in God, service that promotes justice, values-based leadership and global awareness.

Jurgensmeier said that part of his responsibility as a Jesuit is to help others seek the truth he said he has found.

“Cura personalis, or ‘care for the person,’ is the mission of the university, regardless of who the person is,” he said. “We challenge students’ points of view by having them take classes in disciplines that they normally wouldn’t.”

The question he asks is: “Where do I find God in all of this?”

Go to luc.edu/ignatianheritageweek for more information on the events taking place during Ignatian Heritage Week.