

# The Cannonball Moment of Ignatius

FATHER J. FELIX RAJ, SJ

Fourteen thousand Jesuits and their co-workers across the world conclude their celebration of the Ignatian Year on July 31. The Ignatian year commemorates the 500th anniversary of St Ignatius' conversion — that moment when Ignatius, a swaggering “caballero” and soldier was struck by a cannonball while defending the citadel of Pamplona in May 1521 against the French, sustaining a major fracture in his right leg and damage to his left. During his convalescence, the ambitious Basque knight underwent a transformation into Ignatius the pilgrim of his newly chosen leader, Christ.

A Cannonball Moment is when purpose meets a new path when destiny designs the journey. It is the understanding of the ‘why’ that drives what we are, and what we do, it is the derivation of the purpose of life and living. In that moment, life takes on a new meaning and our vision secures version. It is a moment that inspires fulfilment in all areas of life and changes the future by asking us to be fully human and actively alive.

The Ignatian Year from May 20, 2021, to July 31, 2022, was a time for reflection and renewal for Jesuits and their partners — an opportunity to think about their vocation and to focus their desires — in order to become part of the movement to discern a better future for their students,

■ The author is founder vice-chancellor of St Xavier's University, Calcutta



Ignatian Year

alumni/ae, for their communities and the planet earth as a whole. The cannonball moment presented an opportunity for Jesuit colleges and universities to stress the core mission of their institutions — to form men and women for and with others. It was an occasion to invite their stakeholders to ponder not only about the profession they are preparing for, but the way that profession can be a vehicle for making the world a more just and humane place. In his message to the Jesuits for the Ignatian Year, Pope Francis, a Jesuit himself, elaborated how God's plans for individuals are greater than the program they have for themselves, using St. Ignatius as an example: “That cannonball meant that Ignatius failed in the dreams he had for his life, but God had a bigger dream for him. God's dream for Ignatius was not about Ignatius. It was about helping people. It was a dream of transformation, a dream of going out into the world, accompanied by Jesus, humble and poor.”

The cannonball event was celebrated in a special and meaningful way throughout the world. The event brought forth three ideas at the global level:

firstly, during his convalescence, Ignatius let his imagination wander. He imagined himself becoming an apostle of Christ. Secondly, Ignatius' conversion did not occur in a magical instant. It wasn't like the 'lightning that struck St. Paul on his way to Damascus.' Ignatius conducted himself into long moments of self-evaluation to discern and decide. Finally, Ignatius' 'quarantine' sparked a movement that is still going strong all over the world. It is a voyage, a continuous journey of the Jesuits, for the greater glory of God in the spirit of Ignatian Magis (greater) to create a new heaven and a new earth.

A major outcome of the Ignatian year celebration was the announcement of the Jesuit dream in the form of four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) to be observed for the next ten years. The UAPs are spelt out as showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, journeying with youth and caring for our common home. The UAPs are a call to personal and communitarian conversion to rethink how we live, how we work and how we relate to the people we serve. Jesuits and their collaborators in all their institutions have been invited to focus on how their current and future programmes can integrate their preferences to the real-world issues they encounter.

The four apostolic preferences give a horizon, they are very vital and a point of reference to all Jesuits and their collaborators to be implemented in their global mission today.