

THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATION - HANDOUT

SUMMARY NOTES FROM DIRECTIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

by Willi Lambert

The section is inspired from Directions for Communication by Willi Lambert. We invite you read the book for further deepening and exploration. The below invites us to:

1. Reconnect to Ignatius' life and understand how it shaped his practice of communication
2. Explore the characteristics of Ignatius' communication style
3. Understand communication as a way to build bridges and enable encounter

MAIN IDEAS

How did Ignatius behave with others? How did he communicate? How did he learn communication in the school of life?

On first impression, and given his ethnicity and peculiar features, Ignatius did not seem to be an artist in words. He was taciturn, reserved and often awkward in his formulations. Ignatius had learned to move in the courtly "wordly" world, and became accustomed to dealing with the aristocracy. It was later, after his life-threatening wound, his conversion, and pilgrimage to Manresa (places where he learned to communicate with himself and God) that he arrived to Paris to develop another set of communication skills, those related to dealing with others.

In Paris he was able to learn from key experiences, namely:

- **His study years**, which promoted his rational thinking and clarified his concepts. The discussions and the disputations in which he probably took part allowed him to practice listening and clearly distinguish and focus precisely on what was discussed. He also learned to assess the truth of the premises and the validity of the argumentations on both sides.
- **His role as spiritual director**: A crucial trait of his spiritual direction was 1) emphasizing on the individual as such and honoring the differences among individuals, and 2) seeing himself not as a director but a companion, and putting at the center the disposition of the exercitant and his openness to God's spirit and not the director's.
- **His activity as friend of the Friends of Jesus**. The disappearance from his immediate environment of close companions who had received missions, probably also shaped his manners and character.

Later on, in Rome, Ignatius had the huge task of founding and leading the Society of Jesus. This experience also shaped his communication and leadership since he not only had to deal with friends and directees anymore, but there he also learned to deal with individuals who criticized and did not always want the best for the Society of Jesus.

All these experiences shaped Ignatius' manner of communication which was characterized by the following traits:

- love
- friendliness
- being obliging and courteous
- being humorous
- being observant and showing concern to others (their health and their details)
- a loving reverence directed to God and then to "all things"
- being realistic and to the point
- being sensible and reasoned
- active and holistic listening (not only to others in spiritual conversations and counselling but also in decision making processes),
- ready to learn
- single-mindedness
- persistence
- purposeful ("Whatever most helps for this purpose..." is a characteristic expression with Ignatius).

A prolific and strategic communicator

Lambert suggests that when we look closer, Ignatius' example is of a *prolific* and *strategic* communicator. Some of the best insights come from Da C amaras book where we can extract the following learnings on Ignatius' manner of speech:

- He never tried to convince with feelings but with concrete things
- He did not attempt to beautify matters with words, but allowed matters themselves to speak
- His narrative style was simple and crystal clear.

Ignatius favored a language that is simple, intelligible and adapted to the context. He was able to communicate with persons in different ways and on different levels. His concern for being understood by all was motivated by his desire to be "there" for the people. This desire to genuinely connect with others meant speaking in a way they could grasp.

Good insights on communication can also be drawn from the book of the Spiritual Exercises, where Ignatius recommends to the Spiritual Director to **give the best possible interpretation of the words and intentions of the retreatant**. This turns out to be wise advice for most situations. And when there is doubt and a need for clarification, rather than assuming we know what the other person means, we simply **inquire**.

God at the center

An attitude of love and reverence, as well as keeping God at the center were at the core of Ignatius' communication style. Lambert notes that "without love, Ignatius' prudence would be cunning, his elegance sheer worldliness, his realism sheer pragmatism, his strategic thinking manipulation".

Ignatius started his letters with a sketch of a little cross and the name of Jesus. Lambert suggests that this a reminder that it is not only a matter of communicating skillfully or manipulatively, but a kind of human communication as a reflection of our relationship with God.

A brief on key Ignatian themes related to communication is also detailed in the book. We include a summary below:

- Conversations require awareness, preparation, and skill
- Preference for slow, careful, affectionate speech
- Attend to the whole person, including feelings and context, content, manner, and intention (what, how, why)
- Seek to offer opinions that are free from prejudice and open to correction
- It is better to listen more than to speak
- Maintain reverence for the other
- Put the best interpretation on the other person's words and motives, and inquire for greater clarity
- Be gentle and compassionate with critical/constructive feedback
- Make sure to allow enough time for important conversations by exercising patience