



Finding God in *Unexpected* Places

By Kara Connally and Claire Finley

In his book, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, Fr. James Martin, SJ, reminds us that God meets us where we are and encourages us to find God in all things. In their experience of reading this book, Claire Finley and Kara Connally experienced a display of these truths and, even more so, a friendship that “even with hurdles of distance and time, grew in union of hearts and minds,” as Fr. Martin writes in his book. Here is their story.

Over our four years at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, our friendship developed in line with the phases of friendship with God that Fr. Martin discusses: spending time together, learning, being honest, listening carefully, being silent, and changing. Our lives were transformed by relationships with Jesuits, lay colleagues and friends. Graduation brought changes to our lives but in learning to discover and rediscover friendships “our deepest desires, which lead us to become who we are, and [which] are God’s desires for us” were gradually realized. We were on a journey of much discernment and faith, uncertain of what the outcome would be and how it would change us.

Claire

“During a “Busy Person’s Retreat,” my friendship with God grew deeper and I made a decision to pay attention to tugs at my heart. I felt that God

was calling me to embrace poverty and become a volunteer. I took a leap of faith and became a live-in staff member at Maggie’s Place, a home and community for pregnant women who are homeless or alone. I worked at their home in Idaho and then at the coordinating office in Phoenix. I was invited by the retreat organizer at St. Francis Xavier parish to help lead an Ignatian Spirituality Retreat. When I arrived at the first meeting I was handed Fr. Martin’s book, and in that moment I immediately thought to call my best friend Kara.”

Kara

“About 2,700 miles away in Boston, that very book was surfacing in the office where I work, the New England Province of Jesuits, and where my daily conversations and relationships have been a continual and unexpected blessing in my life. I joined a series of Ignatian Conversations for Women to discuss Fr. Martin’s book. During the first session I was asked what image, feeling or words came to mind while reading. I said that I saw God as my friend, which I felt to be true most specially in my relationships. Being apart from my family and closest friends back in Seattle has forced me to be a better listener and to share the gifts God has given me. I wished Claire could experience this with me, and immediately e-mailed her.”

We started a long-distance “book club” to reflect every Wednesday night on the questions Fr. Martin raises in his book, as well as moments in our lives that mimicked these messages. This was not an easy endeavor, for just as in our prayer lives, we found ourselves



Claire Finley and Kara Connally

drifting off topic or missing our scheduled rendezvous.

It was a special experience to share the vulnerable, enlightening and triumphant moments of our faith journey and our lives. God really did meet us where we were: busy women, taking a leap of faith, and having friendship and support of those around us to learn and grow. God came to us in many forms, through a mother’s encouragement, through conversations and e-mails with each other, through work, and through Fr. Martin’s words. We are both extremely blessed to have each other as well as many Jesuits, colleagues and friends, who, as Fr. Martin states most eloquently, “enrich [our] lives with their insights, inspire [us] with their faith, and challenge [us] to become better persons.”

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Fr. Martin’s book, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything, A Spirituality for Real Life* is available on Amazon.com.