

Joyful, Generous, Brotherly Love

I often return to a memory that conveys everything I have come to love about Fairfield Prep.

The time was this past October—one of those stunningly beautiful New England fall days. It was my second season as an assistant cross country coach and the boys had just come in from a long run. They were sweaty and tired and ready to drop so we sent them onto Grauert Field for a cool-down and stretch.

Our captains knew the drill—one of them would lead the team in a sort of call-and-answer stretching routine that everyone knew by heart. But on this particular day, as the boys sprawled out on the grass, one of our captains looked down at our smallest frosh, smiled, and told him that today he would be leading the team.

For a moment, it was as though the spirit of some generous Giver had come alive in their midst. I can still see the joy in that senior's eye, and I can still summon the memory of our little hero at the center of a cheering circle, uncontrollable excitement in his every expression. Each man came alive to himself that day; in the process, they expressed something deeply true about who we are as a community.

I have been at Prep for nearly two years now, and I can attest that it is very much a "school of excellence," true to a proud tradition of academic rigor and achievement.

We are every bit the hub of innovative learning that would make our Jesuit forebears proud. But to me, what makes our school truly distinct is the way we orient that knowledge in the service of the heart. What makes Prep Prep, a place revered and cherished and loved, is the kind of big-hearted generosity that I experienced with our cross country team on that idyllic October afternoon.

"Only the one who loves fully realizes himself or herself as a person," wrote Pedro Arrupe, S.J., in his transformative speech "Men and Women for Others." To me *this* is what makes Jesuit education something wholly different. For while a great education moves students to know themselves and the world anew, a great Jesuit education goes a step further—inviting students to love themselves and the world anew.

How do we do that—how do we teach our students to love? We love first by being loved. Our frosh hero felt it that day, and so too did all

those who cheered him on. In words unspoken, they heard 'this is the joy we are meant for; this is what it feels like to belong.'

And when we feel that, when we are full of such blessings, then, like that gracious captain, we feel moved by gratitude to give it away—to say deep in the heart 'I have been given so much; I want others to have what I have received.'

To our boys, the truth of this dynamic can be summed up in a single word: brotherhood. And it is a beautiful summation, for it echos the very language we Jesuits use when speaking of fellow Jesuits: *fraters*, brothers. Each case speaks from a desire to live out of a commandment Jesus gifted his disciples: "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12).

What this commandment implies is that love is a choice. And that choice involves letting go of control—an act of faith. It means letting go of power—an act of vulnerability. Only then can love come alive within us. Curiously, what we discover is not a loss of freedom, but freedom gained; not a loss of self, but a self revealed. In the words of Arrupe, we begin to truly realize who we are. And that is because underneath every choice to love is the voice of our one true source, speaking deep into the heart and saying: *as I have loved you*.

A hundred times a day at Prep we nudge one another to choose to live out of the love

that shapes our lives. When we do, strange and wonderful things start to happen. Seniors start to cheer on the freshmen. The team starts to reign over the individual. And joy becomes the pattern by which we live. What emerges is a community built on the strength of humility, compassion, kindness, and generosity. Given the fruits of our work, we ask: what could be more important than an education that teaches our boys to lean into love?

At Prep, we know that it is only through encounters of love that we can truly seek, find, and fulfill the meaning of our lives. For when we embrace the love we receive, we grow up, becoming alive to ourselves and alive to one another. And then our hearts become full—full enough to spill out into a world yearning for our joyful, generous, brotherly love.

— **Brendan Coffey, S.J.**

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Fairfield Prep will bid a sad farewell to **Mr. Brendan Coffey, S.J.**, who will depart Prep after his two-year Regency. Mr. Coffey has been a beloved colleague, friend and mentor to faculty, staff and students alike. His passion for Jesuit life and the Ignatian way are inspiring. The Prep Community prays for him and wishes him blessings as he proceeds into final studies at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in California prior to ordination. The door is always open at Prep for Brendan Coffey, S.J.! Please join us in praying for our Jesuit collaborators as we give thanks for the dedication to the vital mission of Jesuit education. **AMDGI!**