

ITEST Member Spotlight
Fr. Kevin FitzGerald, SJ, PhD, PhD

After decades of involvement in the issues that arise at the intersection of faith and science, I am sometimes asked if my career was the one I envisioned when I entered the Society of Jesus after graduating from college in 1977. The fascinating reality that lies behind my answer to this question is that I did enter the Jesuits hoping for a vocation that would allow me to bring my faith, and the richness of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, to a career in the burgeoning field of molecular genetics. However, I had no clue at that time as to the expanse of new knowledge, technologies, and ethical quandaries this particular intersection of faith and science would involve, and how I would be called to participate in national and international projects and discussions intent on exploring and determining how best communities and nations might pursue the development and use of this rapidly expanding field.

It was early on in my formation as a Jesuit that I encountered ITEST at St. Louis University. During my first months at SLU, I was invited by Fr. Robert Brungs, SJ to join the group and their discussions regarding the intersection of faith and science, even though I had just begun my philosophy studies and a Master's program in biochemistry. As a physicist, Fr. Brungs understood the challenges I would face in pursuing a career in science as a Jesuit, and so he wanted me to be part of a group that embraced that intersection of faith and science. What ITEST gave me was a wonderful community of scholars, all committed to a constructive dialogue about how faith and science could be better integrated so that each might better serve the needs and goals of people everywhere. Our discussions gave me the opportunity to see how what I was learning in my philosophy and biochemistry programs could be applied to the real world issues that both faith and science were being challenged to address. I met scholars who helped me continue to deepen my education in philosophy, theology, and molecular biology. Through my doctoral studies in molecular genetics and in bioethics, and continuing to today, I have benefited greatly from my membership in ITEST.

My early career interactions with the scholars at ITEST meetings also turned out to be great practice for me for several of my future involvements, including serving as:

- Committee member for the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion,
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health, and Society,
- Pontifical Council for Culture's Science and Technology Consultors, and
- Pontifical Academy for Life (the bioethics advisory group of the Vatican).

No matter the venue, when experts are gathered to determine policies regarding the potential uses of developments like cloning, stem cell research, and genetic information and treatments, it is imperative that at least some of the experts present have experience in aligning the goals of both the scientific and faith communities in order to achieve policies that will protect and benefit all the communities involved.

ITEST gave me my start in gaining that experience.

The Rev. Kevin T. FitzGerald, SJ, PhD, PhD serves as the inaugural chair of the Department of Medical Humanities in the School of Medicine. He is the John A. Creighton University Professor, and an associate professor in the School of Medicine, Department of Medical Education, at Creighton University. He received a PhD in molecular genetics and a PhD in bioethics from Georgetown University. His research efforts focus on the utilization of reflection in medical education, the investigation of abnormal gene expression in cancer, and on ethical issues in biomedical research and medical genomics.

Father Kevin currently serves on the ITEST Board of Directors.