

News

Cooking up some faith

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES DEANERY — Prayer, service to others and the experience of community are important to Peggy Dillon, and she has found a meaningful way to incorporate them into her faith life as a volunteer with the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC).

Everyday Evangelists

By Sister Eileen Connelly, OSU

IVC offers persons over the age of 50 an opportunity to minister to those in need — the materially poor, the sick, imprisoned and those who just need a listening ear. Ignatian volunteers commit to a year of service, two days a week, from September to June. They also have the chance to reflect on how the interactions with those they serve impacts their own spirituality, gathering monthly for group reflection, along with meeting individually with a spiritual director.

Dillon, a member of St. Robert Belarmino Parish, was among the first group of volunteers with the Cincinnati chapter of IVC established in 2005. Both the service and reflection components of the program appealed to her.

"It just made sense to me and matches the way I try to live my faith. I've always been involved in service in some capacity," said Dillon, whose professional experience includes many years teaching in the Diocese of Covington and serving as dean of students at Xavier University.

"I also liked the idea of coming together to discuss what we're doing and praying about it," Dillon added.

During her first year with IVC Dillon worked with CAIN (Churches Active in Northside) assisting clients with food

stamps. Although IVC volunteers are only asked to commit to one year of service, Dillon recently began year three, determined to be "part of the solution."

She currently volunteers three days a week at Cincinnati Cooks, a program of the Freestore Food Bank. A free, 10-week long culinary training program, Cincinnati Cooks trains low-income, at-risk adults for employment in the food service industry. Classes of 10-12 adults receive comprehensive training in all aspects of kitchen operation and food preparation. The students use food donated to the food bank to provide snacks and meals for children in the Freestore's Kids Café program. Since it was established in 2001, Cincinnati Cooks has graduated more than 400 students and found employment for 70 percent of its graduates.

Dillon's ministry includes keeping the students' records up to date, assisting them with setting up email accounts and completing online job applications, and tutoring those who struggle with fractions, an essential skill for a cook to master.

She enjoys working with the students. "I just love them. They come from different backgrounds. Some have prison records. Some are parents. They're people that have had a hard time and are now willing to work hard to change their lives."

The most rewarding aspect of her volunteer work is witnessing the students' joy and sense of accomplishment as they progress through the training program. "The students are so eager to learn and many of them start to achieve right away and you can see how that helps them feel better about themselves. It's rewarding to help them experience that," Dillon said.

She recalls one male student who appeared to be very "rough and tough" but was, in fact, extremely determined to succeed. Dillon helped him complete online job applications as he was preparing to



COURTESY PHOTO

Peggy Dillon, currently in service with the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, poses with pictures of Cincinnati Cooks students.

graduate and received a big hug in return. "That's a great reward right there," she said.

The staff and students of Cincinnati Cooks have also found it rewarding to have Dillon as part of the team.

"Peggy is a great asset to our program,"

said Fernando Scarbriel, chef in charge of the kitchen. "She has a such a good heart, is very conscientious and is always smiling. She helps make our students leaders."

For more information about IVC, call Sam Schloemer, regional director, at 513-608-5551. ■

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