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The Ignatian Volunteer Corps

Spirituality at the Heart of Service

“St. Cecilia’s warms my heart,” Jim Wilson said recently. He is a retired attorney and for eleven years City Counselor of St. Louis, Missouri, who has been working two days a week as part of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps at St. Cecilia’s Academy, a school in the city’s south side. The school principal, Jim Ford, had encouraged him to develop a course for middle school children to learn about the law, to meet lawyers and judges, and to get inspired in their studies. Over the course of a year Jim became more and more an important part of the life of the school, and he has fallen in love with the place.

In 1995 two Jesuit priests, Fathers Jim Conroy and Charlie Costello, formed the

first Ignatian Volunteer Corps in Baltimore. They hoped to meet the needs of retired men and women seeking meaningful service in the context of their spirituality. For Ignatian Volunteers, serving the poor is interwoven with their desire for spiritual growth in the Ignatian tradition. Now more than 275 Ignatian Volunteers serve throughout the United States, including seven men and women in the newly formed and growing St. Louis group.

Father Kevin Cullen had heard about the program in 2005 and contacted the IVC national office to learn more. He discovered that a number of local people had already expressed an interest in the program and had signed on in the event that a St. Louis group

by Sean Agniel

Jim Wilson with eighth grade teacher Deacon James Tetreault at St. Cecilia’s Academy.



Betty Ytzaina with student at St. Cecilia's.

An Ignatian Volunteer Profile

- Ignatian Volunteers, unlike most senior volunteer programs, have about equal numbers of men and women.
- Most Ignatian Volunteers have college degrees. Eighty-eight percent have college degrees, and 59 percent have received some postgraduate education. Ten percent have completed some college work, and 2 percent did not attend college.
- The age of Ignatian Volunteers ranges from 50 to 84, with an average age of 68.
- Eighty percent of volunteers are retired, 15 percent work part-time, and 4 percent work full-time.

Data from an IVC survey funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

would be formed. Cullen formed an advisory council, and began a year of planning, interviewing volunteers, and setting up partnerships with local organizations that served the poor and had a need for volunteers. The first Ignatian Volunteers began serving in the fall of 2006 at St. Cecilia's grade school and Marian Middle School. Now in its second year, IVC-St. Louis has placed seven volunteers. They work in schools, and with the homeless, and at a children's home, and they help ex-offenders find jobs.

Ignatian Volunteers commit two days, or about fifteen hours, a week for a year, serving from September through June. Many Volunteers renew their commitment the following year. The organization always seeks a good match for their Volunteers, considering always the interest, concerns, and talents of the Volunteer and the needs of the community they will serve. Unlike many volunteer opportunities, the Ignatian Volunteer offers a substantial, sustained commitment to the organization they serve. Their contributions are more on the level of staff persons than the occasional volunteer.

Once a month Volunteers gather for prayer, shared reflection on their service, and conversation on a book selected to be read by all Ignatian Volunteers that year throughout

the country. Volunteers become grounded and inspired by an Ignatian way of looking at the world. In reflecting on their service, they are encouraged to notice God's movements in their own lives and among the community of people they serve. Volunteers also keep a personal journal and regularly meet with a spiritual reflector — a Jesuit or layperson experienced in Ignatian spirituality — to talk in more depth about their experience of service in the light of their spirituality.

Bernie Giacabazi found out about the Ignatian Volunteer Corps while on retreat at the White House Retreat center in St. Louis. He loved the Jesuits and was attracted to Ignatian spirituality. Bernie had previously served as a volunteer with a number of organizations, but he leapt at the opportunity to offer service within a spiritual setting. Bernie lives in Peoria, Illinois, and volunteers at a home for children sponsored by Catholic Charities. He travels all the way to St. Louis for his monthly IVC meetings — a three-hour drive! But it's been worth it. "I get a lot out of gathering once a month with everyone and hearing their stories," Bernie says, and his spiritual life has been greatly enriched.

Jerry Holden works with the homeless outreach program at St. Francis Xavier College Church in St. Louis as an Ignatian Volunteer. He studied at Fordham University in New York in the 1950s, and was introduced to faith-based service as a college student through Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. After time in the military, graduate studies in social work, and a career operating a successful roofing business, his prospects of retirement allowed him to consider once again a greater commitment to service as a reflection of his spiritual life. The seeds of service planted in college were given new life for Jerry through the Ignatian Volunteer Corps. The personal attention he found in IVC was a new experience for him. He has found that his spiritual reflector "has opened up a whole vista to me. He's done a tremendous amount for my spiritual life. It's become more real."

Jim Owens works two days a week with the Criminal Justice Ministries of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, helping ex-offenders inventory their skills and find jobs after their release from prison. He is retired from a career working in human resources, and is a village trustee where he lives in Wildwood, Missouri. Jim is particularly happy with IVC's volunteer commitment to one service agency for a substantial amount of time, about fifteen hours, each week. "It changes your perspective. It exacts something from you. Even though you might be having a bad day, you see that these guys have an absolute need that is not being provided for," he says. "You're doing it, and you may not get the warm fuzzies every day, but you do it to meet their need."

Betty Ytzaina is in her second year as a Volunteer with IVC. She was uncertain if her career as an administrative assistant would qualify her for work with one of the IVC partner organizations. But her service as a teacher's aide and reading tutor at St. Cecilia's has made a tremendous contribution in the lives of children there. "I think my time at St. Cecilia's has given me a keen

awareness of the beauty and simplicity in the first and second graders I work with, and I feel it's provided an occasion of grace for me to discover God's beauty and simplicity in other encounters as well."

Betty's experience has much in common with other Volunteers. Through their service to the poor, God speaks to Ignatian Volunteers in many different and hope-filled ways. St. Ignatius of Loyola is a steady guide for IVC members in encouraging them to "find God in all things." Even in the most impoverished and unlikely of places, God has warmed their hearts, and filled them with divine love and compassion for the world. **J**



Sean Agniel is regional director for IVC-St. Louis. For more information visit the Ignatian Volunteer Corps website: www.ivcusa.org, or contact Sean Agniel directly: sagniel@ivcusa.org, or 314-361-7765.

How Ignatian Volunteers Assess their Experience

- 93 percent of Ignatian Volunteers feel they are spending retirement in a fulfilling way;
- 89 percent feel they are making a difference in people's lives;
- 86 percent are using skills that they had before joining IVC to help others;
- 86 percent are learning more about problems of poverty and other social issues;
- 82 percent say IVC helped them recognize social injustice and use their spiritual beliefs to form opinions about social problems;
- 79 percent have come to know individuals on a personal basis who are economically poor or needy.

Data from an IVC survey funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

Newsmakers



Francis X. Ryan

Father **Francis X. Ryan**, professor of English and chairman of the English department at John Carroll University in Cleveland, professed his final vows at the Jesuit community chapel on March 12, 2008.

Brother **Robert Macke**, who is working on his doctorate in physics at Central Florida State University, passed his candidacy exam and will continue research for his doctoral dissertation, which will focus on meteorites.

Father **Marco Tulio Gómez** is teaching at Arrupe Jesuit High School in Denver as part of a twinning agreement with the Central American province. **José Antonio "Chepe" Rubio**, also from the Central

American province, will begin serving his regency period of formation as a teacher at Arrupe in the fall.

Arrupe Jesuit High School, which serves a largely Hispanic population, bases its curriculum on the model pioneered by Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago. A recent book published by Loyola Press, *The Christo Rey Story. More Than a Dream. How One School's Vision is*

Changing the World, by G.R. Kearney, examines this influential and innovative program.

Finding God in All Things: Celebrating Bernard Lonergan, John Courtney Murray, and Karl Rahner, edited by Fathers **Mark Bosco** of the Missouri Province and **David Stagaman** of the Chicago Province, has been published by Fordham University Press. One of its fea-

tured chapters, "Rahner, von Balthasar, and the Question of Theological Aesthetics: Preliminary Considerations," is by Father **James Voiss**, a theologian at Saint Louis University. Bosco is also author of the introduction to a new edition of Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul*, part of the Penguin Classics series of reissues of all of Greene's novels.