

Ignatian Volunteer Corps seeks new members

By Eileen Connelly, OSU

ARCHDIOCESE - Just because someone retires it doesn't mean his or her work has ended. In fact, it may just be beginning as that newfound freedom leads to opportunities for retirees to share their gifts and life experiences with others.

That's the goal behind the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC), a national organization of retired people, age 50 and over, who volunteer in their local communities, while working for a more just society and growing in their faith. Founded in Maryland by Jesuit Fathers Jim Conroy and Charlie Costello, the IVC welcomed its first members in 1995 and has since spread to cities throughout the United States. Now, the program has come to the archdiocese, making it the 15th IVC site, with Cincinnati native Sam Schloemer named director of the local chapter.

His own connections to the Jesuits and Ignatian tradition are strong. Schloemer holds a masters degree in business administration from Xavier University; two of his children are also graduates, and he and his wife, Patricia, have been active members of Bellarmine Chapel since 1987. Schloemer said his interest in working as director of the IVC is rooted in these connections along with his experiences of service to others, which include mentoring in an inner-city school, Kairos Prison Ministry at Lebanon Correctional Institute, and serving as a Stephen Minister, a ministry of Christian listening.

"I appreciate reflecting and praying with others in that it helps me see more clearly the face of Jesus in the people I meet and see in my everyday life," he explained. "The Ignatian tradition of finding God in all things resonates with me as I go about each day."

Schloemer compares his duties as newly appointed director to the responsibilities of a small business owner. He has been working to find office space and a meeting place for monthly gatherings, to establish a budget and is serving as a liaison between the national IVC headquarters in Boston and the Jesuit's Chicago Province, of which Cincinnati is a part.

Among Schloemer's primary tasks is identifying and contacting local host agencies to develop opportunities for IVC volunteers. This process began early in 2005, he said, when an IVC team met in Cincinnati to discern community needs, from working with the city's growing Hispanic population to visiting inmates at the Hamilton County Justice Center. "IVC is unique and compelling in that it offers persons over 50 years of age the opportunity to administer to those in need - the materially poor, the sick, those in prison, those who need someone with a listening ear. The volunteers have the opportunity to reflect on what is stirring in their own hearts as they work with care receivers," Schloemer said.

He hopes to have 12 volunteers placed by Sept. 1 and will be actively recruiting beginning with his own parish. Schloemer also plans to contact churches that already have structured social mission activities, place announcements and ads in various publications and hold informational follow up meetings. He especially hopes to draw volunteers from the many alumni, parishioners, retreatants and friends that the Jesuit apostolates in Cincinnati have yielded through the years.

The commitment required of IVC volunteers is service for 10 months out of the year, working two days a week or equivalent hours at a service agency. Volunteers are also asked to reflect on their experience by keeping a journal, meeting individually each month with a spiritual director and as a community with other IVC members, and gathering periodically throughout the year for an overnight retreat or day of reflection. This reflection piece is critical for the volunteers' spiritual development, said Schloemer, to help draw them closer to God and bring meaning and hope to their lives.

Schloemer encouraged local retirees to consider volunteering with the IVC because of what it will mean to those in need. "Consider the expressions on the face of a child, a sick and/or immobile single parent, an aging senior citizen who can't get out and needs someone to talk to, holding the hand of someone who is chronically ill in a nursing home, or visiting someone in a county jail."

As the work of the Cincinnati IVC moves forward, Schloemer requested prayers, now and for the future. "We need prayer and guidance that God will bless the agencies to be open to our efforts to help people in need, and that potential volunteers will respond to God's call to incorporate service as prayer in their spiritual lives."

Agencies and individuals interested in learning more the IVC should contact Schloemer at 513-608-5551 or cincy@ilvc.org. For more information and history visit the national IVC website at ILVC@ilvc.org.

<http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/tct/apr1406/041406ignatian.html>