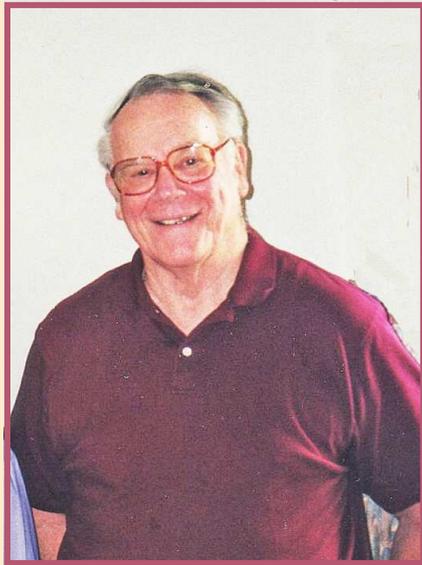


Corps Connector

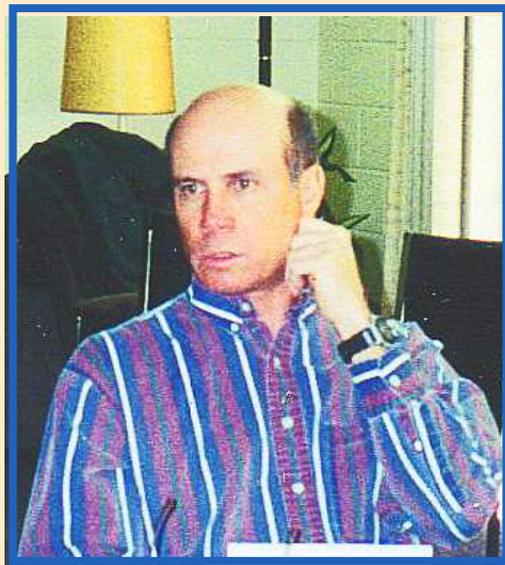
Volume 8 Number 2

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IVC National Office Early Photo

Charlie Costello



IVC National Office Early Photo

Jim Conroy

Special Edition:

The Early Days
of IVC in DC, Maryland
and Northern Virginia

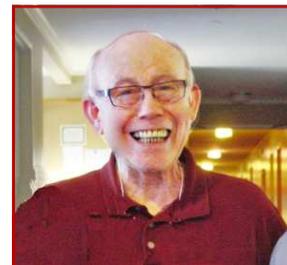
An Interview with Some Early IVCers

Washington DC/
Metro Maryland
& Northern
Virginia Regional
Council

Mike Goggin
Patricia Holley
Regional Directors

Joseph Dempsey
James Kelley
Pamela Lucey
Dennis Lucey
Joseph McCloskey, S.J.
Francis Murphy
Joseph Raia
Grace Risetto
Richard Urban

Notes from the Editor



Dick Bowling

On February 6 of this year Jim Kelley drove me over to DC to Kathleen Curtin's home, to interview four members of the Ignatian Volunteer Corps. I felt that since IVC is now seventeen years old and getting older that the memories of its beginnings can fade and get lost. I felt it imperative to record the stories of what it was like in the very early days.

These four are among the earliest: Madeleine Kirk who is one of the earliest volunteers in all of IVC. She became a volunteer in 1996, just one year after IVC began in 1995 and she continues her service to this day. Pat Connelly and Katy Shea both were accepted in 1999. The last person I interviewed was Kathleen who although not a volunteer was one of the first persons invited by Jim Conroy to become a spiritual reflector. This was a new concept for IVC having a lay person and a woman as a reflector. Up to then, Jim and Charlie Costello, the two founders, had done almost all the spiritual reflection. Kathleen began in 1999.

I began the interview with Madeleine. I recorded the interview on both video and audio recorders.

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Dick Bowling, Editor

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Photos by Dick Bowling unless otherwise noted

Corps Connector: Madeleine, can you tell us about your earliest memories of IVC. How you found out about it and came to become a member?

Madeleine: In 1995 I spotted an article in the Holy Trinity bulletin describing an organization that was just being formed. It was called the Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps (ILVC) and was founded by two Jesuits in Baltimore: Jim Conroy, S.J. and Charlie Costello, S.J. I had just returned to Washington after many years of living in various countries as the wife of an American Foreign Service officer and it sounded perfect for me.

I contacted Jim and Charlie and they invited me to come for an interview in Baltimore and talk to them about this new organization. When I got there Jim and Charlie greeted me cheerfully and described their idea. This was an organization for people over 50 who were willing to volunteer two days a week to work for the poor and receive spiritual direction. This spiritual direction was to help the volunteer understand the problems of people living in poverty. It was so exciting listening to them talk about this idea and how it was going to work. They were so enthusiastic. They gave me a long form to fill out and mail back to them. I walked out of that meeting convinced this was the place for me. And it really has been from the very beginning. I think it was the idea of combining work with the poor and gaining spiritual



Madeleine Kirk

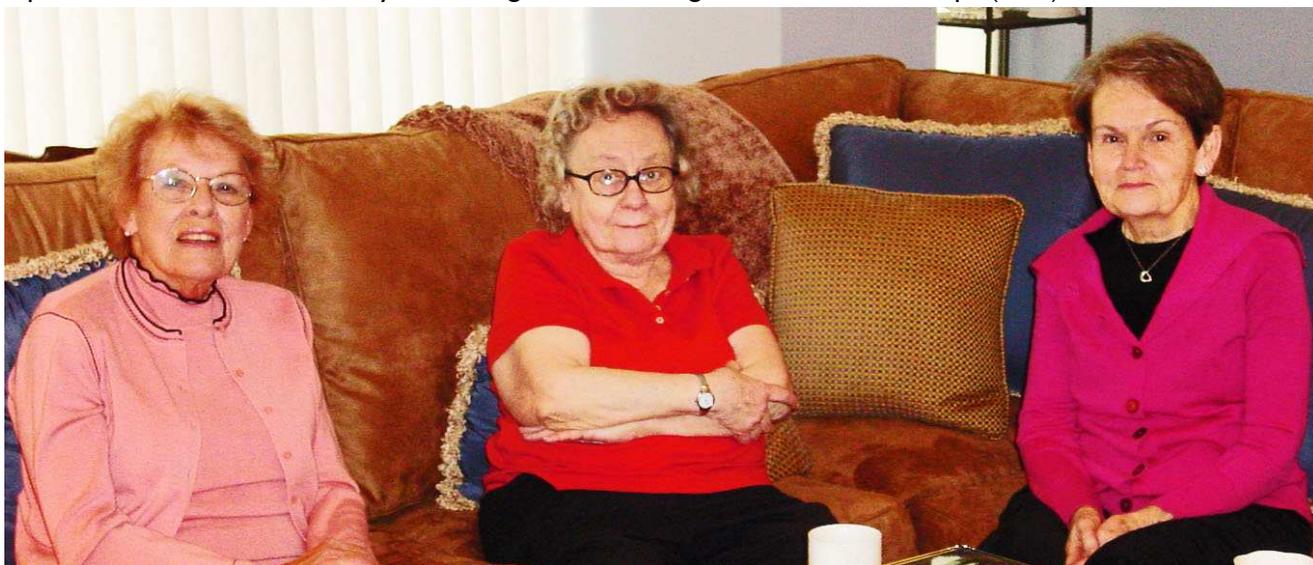
I think it was the idea of combining work with the poor and gaining spiritual perspective and personal growth. Those were the things that really struck me. I had lived in India where the poverty was everywhere and overwhelming. Early in India for instance at Mother Theresa's orphanage, I took my children there and we changed diapers and wiped noses of the orphaned babies. And it was very rewarding work.

Corps Connector: So what was it like talking to Jim Conroy or Charlie Costello?

Absolutely dynamic! They really were inspiring. And they had energy! It was contagious. Jim Conroy was my Spiritual Reflector initially and that was very rich. I'll never forget at one of the very first City Group meetings somebody complained about journaling and he said "Just do it." I mean he was the captain of the ship. Charlie was the softer side. He was very reflective and gave us a spiritual side. Each month he would write out what we were to talk about and reflect on at our meetings. Well, to tell the truth, I had a lot of trouble understanding some of his theology and Jesuit reflections. That's when I decided to take some time out for a couple of years to study at Trinity College in their Education for Parish Service program. Later I rejoined ILVC, by then it was called the Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC).

“This spiritual direction was to help the volunteer understand the problems of people living in poverty.”

perspective and personal growth. Those were the things that really struck me. I had lived in India where the poverty was everywhere and overwhelming. Early in India for instance at Mother Theresa's orphanage, I took my children there and we changed diapers and wiped noses of the orphaned babies. And it was very rewarding work.



Three of those interviewed: (L-R) Pat Connelly, Katy Shea, & Kathleen Curtin. Madeleine Kirk had left for a City Group Meeting

Pat Connelly

Corps Connector: Pat, what do you remember?

I remember I was still working at Georgetown University. One morning coming out of Mass—we used to go to Mass in the small chapel in the quadrangle—I found this magazine. It was a Jesuit publication but not anything sophisticated like America magazine and I picked it up. I stood there and read this short article about two retired men who were looking for something to do. And they came across

this new Jesuit volunteer organization that had a spiritual component.

And I thought that makes sense. And I made the commitment right then and there, that that's what I'm going to do when I retire. I left the magazine there since there was only this one copy and I thought maybe other people might want to read about this. I never found who those two men were that the article talked about. I did try to find them. They might have been two guys in Baltimore, since I probably read that article back in 1997.

I kept trying to find out: how do you get in contact with this organization? But I had no names, only that it was this Jesuit volunteer group for people who were retired and wanted to do service with the poor and that it had a spiritual component. I asked Fr. Schemel at Georgetown, the Jesuit assigned to staff spirituality. He didn't know anything about this group either. (He is still around I understand.) Anyway somehow or other the Holy Spirit gave me the right information.

Subsequently I got an application and was invited to go over to Baltimore. I didn't get to meet with either of the two founders, but I talked with this woman in the



“This guy had complained about journaling. It seems like he had complained last year and the year before that. He didn't like it, it's too hard to do. One morning he came into this session and he was beaming. He says, 'I finally can do it—now’”

office. Her name was Barbara Costillano. She was a fabulous source of the spirit. I was very impressed with the whole tenor—the philosophy of this organization. And she conveyed this very, very nicely. At the end of that meeting she said, “So far as I can tell you are accepted at this moment.” And I said “That's good.” “Next,” she said, “I'll give you some material about the organizations that are interested in having a volunteer from our group.” And I said, “Oh that would be great!” Then she gave me four files, saying she could give me ten more if I

described the mission of the organization and a brief job description. She said, “Why don't you go over these and pick out a few. Then you can contact them.” Which is what I did.

And I left there with four folders for four organizations. I called and set up an interview with three of them. I was interested in all three and all three appeared to be interested in me—thank you very much. That day I committed myself to working for Crossway Community. This organization works with moms with young children. They educate them and they live in a residential program. It was a challenge for me each day I was there; as it was a challenge for each mom trying to progress just to get above the poverty line, just to be a good mom, further their education and so forth.

The retreats in those days were extremely stimulating. We would normally meet people who were volunteers from Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia. Very, very vigorous, enthusiastic. Madeleine, I believe it was you a few minutes ago who mentioned something about the Journaling component. I still remember this day. This guy had complained about journaling. It seems like he had complained last year and the year before that. He didn't like it, it's too hard to do. One morning he came into this session and he was beaming. He says, “I finally can do it—now I have it. I work on my computer and do my journaling on my computer every morning and it works just fine.” And a number of people in the group said, “Oh I think I will try that.”

Corps Connector: You mentioned retreats. Where were these held?

The ones that I remember: two different places on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Another one was in upstate New Jersey at a beach place called Long Branch. A Redemptorist retreat house. And that was just lovely.

Katy Shea

Corps Connector: *Katy what do you remember from your very earliest days?*

Charlie and Jim. They were the essential elements of the organization They seemed to do everything, including raising the money necessary. I think Jim ruined his knees running. I found out about the organization through the Holy Trinity church bulletin and contacted I don't know if it was Jim or Charlie. I think it was probably Jim who was at that time the rector of the Jesuit community at St. Al's.

For my first assignment he picked me and Ambassador Tom Byrne to go down and talk to the Jesuit Refugee Service which was a part of the Jesuit Conference. They had started a program which the provincials were paying for and the provincials wanted to have the program evaluated. Ambassador Tom Byrne and I were selected for this evaluation. We had a wonderful time traveling to New Jersey and California and El Paso. And writing a truly terrific report on the program which was putting Jesuit priests in as chaplains in Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention centers where illegal immigrants were being detained. (INS is now ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement.) We evaluated the program and wrote a report. The provincials liked the report so much they said keep Katy Shea and Tom Byrne around to make sure they implement the recommendations of the program. So I stayed for another year, Tom stayed longer than I did. It became very clear that the recommendations were not going to be implemented appropriately and at that point I decided to end my first assignment for IVC.

As Pat was describing we had wonderful retreats. I think they were enriched by having people from completely different environments: upstate New York, New Jersey, Baltimore. The group was very very small. As an aside, much later I went to a City Group meeting on the Virginia side of the river when I couldn't get to the City Group

“All in all I think it was a big advantage being small. I'm not sure if the disadvantages in our organization as it exists today to being large have

on our side and I found it was a very stimulating experience. I had a number of participants who came up to me afterward and said how stimulating it was to have someone who had a different viewpoint and a different approach to problems. I offer that as a suggestion for the

future to mix the City Groups up somewhat.

Anyhow I went from the Jesuit Refugee Service to a legal job. I decided, OK you've been a lawyer for a long time, it's time to put those talents to work. I did volunteering at the University Legal Services down near Capitol Hill. That was a job Mike Dobb had found for

me. He had worked there when he was a seminarian. It was a wonderful job, I loved it very much and helped a lot of people I think. except I found I wanted to solve all their problems and that's not possible. And that's one of the first things you learn as a volunteer that you can't solve all the problems

From there I went to the Capital Area Food Bank where I finished out five years. I helped them raise money and did whatever they asked me to do. Although this was a very rewarding job it was not in direct public service.

Corps Connector: *Do you remember about how many people were in IVC at that time? It was called Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps (ILVC) at that time.*

No I don't. I know. It was small, we all knew each other, knew each other's backgrounds. All in all I think it was a big advantage being small. I'm not sure if the disadvantages of being large in IVC as it exists today have been properly addressed.



Kathleen Curtin

Corps Connector: Kathleen you're a little different in the sense that you are a spiritual reflector and not a volunteer. Tell us how you got involved with IVC?.

My earliest contact was actually before it was IVC, before it was anything. In 1989 our son was a novice in the Society of Jesus at Wernersville, Maryland. Jim Conroy was his novice master. At the first parents' weekend the novices gave a presentation on Ignatius, their spiritual formation and the service work they were doing as novices. One of the parents asked Jim: "Gee, we know there is JVC [Jesuit Volunteer Corps]

for people coming out of college, live in community and grow spiritually and work with the poor. Why isn't there something like that for us?" Most of us parents were in our late forties, and we knew we could be retiring soon. And everyone thought we'll have a lot of energy left maybe something like this should be created for people like us.



I've said this about Jim, it's usually from the beginning of an idea to its fruition is about six years. He's very thoughtful and you can tell he really liked the idea and was mulling it over. I knew he was still thinking about this because a year or so later he called a few people around Baltimore and DC to come together to brainstorm the idea. One of these was my husband Mike. By 1996 IVC had already begun in Baltimore and now they were going to officially start something in DC. So one day Jim contacted me, I was on staff with Blessed Sacrament at the time. He wanted to know if he could use a room at Blessed Sacrament to talk to people who might be interested in becoming part of IVC. I remember Julia Albrecht being at the first meeting.

Shortly after that, that was in 1999, I made the Spiritual Exercises under Jim's direction, he became my spiritual director. A year later he and Charlie felt that the organization had now grown to such an extent; there were more people here and more people in Baltimore and the two of them could not do all the spiritual reflection. Jim then enlisted the aid of other people who had made the spiritual exercises. People who were trained to be spiritual reflectors and we would take on that duty with IVC which was wonderful. And so things had changed. A kind of a comical thing happened for me. I didn't know

if I was really supposed to go to the City Group meetings. At that time I was actually babysitting full time for some of the grandchildren. At first I wasn't sure if the spiritual reflector wasn't in one position and the volunteer/service people in another in IVC. But in the City Group it was totally other. And I wondered at first if I am intruding on the people who are sharing their ser-

"... [Jim] and Charlie felt that the organization had now grown to such an extent;...[that] the two of them could not do all the spiritual reflec-

vice, it made me feel like I'd really like to be doing what they are doing. And what's the point of doing what I'm doing? I remember Mike O'Donnell [Baltimore, Washington, DC, Northern Virginia Regional Director] saying to me would you please come to the City Group meeting. At that time it was at Georgetown Prep. And as everybody realizes I kept coming and in fact Mike asked if I would also come when they began the Virginia group because it was very, very small, at the time there were only about seven people So I started going to the City Groups in Virginia .

Corps Connector: Can you tell us where the name spiritual reflector came from and what it was like with the first few people you were a reflector for?

The term was derived from spiritual director. A person who meets one on one with another person and accompanies them on their spiritual journey. Jim and Charlie chose the word Spiritual reflector rather than director. In the beginning they thought that people were only going to come into IVC for a year or two and since they had not chosen to seek out spiritual direction on their own, they might not be interested in spiritual direction. That they wouldn't want to talk about their whole life but would rather talk about their service. So that was how it was set up, it was to reflect

Continued next page

with another person one on one about the service to kind of go deeper to give it a more spiritual meaning. What has been the surprise is that this spiritual component has so supported, inspired and just illuminated the service element, that coupled with the support people receive in the City Groups and Retreats, this has been what has stopped burn-out. To the point where, in this area, you now have an average service of seven and a half years

The reflection itself has also changed from talking about just the service to the invitation of the volunteers to let it be broader, let it go deeper. I can remember at one retreat I gave, asking the question: "If you see yourself being more patient and kind and not judgmental at your service site, do you not find that is also true in the rest of your life?" And in the back of my mind I'm thinking: If you don't you're missing the point here. So this is the idea of reflection: it begins with the service, IVC always has to be about the service. But it also has to help people understand that this is their prayer life. Their relationships with their families and the community. That God is working in all places.

What has happened to me is that by being a reflector (and I have always have had five to six people every year) and then taking part in the City Group I get to see the whole dynamic of what people are doing and the interaction that makes it much better. I've also had the privilege of giving a lot of retreats. As matter of fact I was the one who gave that retreat at Long Branch that Pat was talking about. There were 105 people at that East coast retreat in 2002

Memory Sharing

Corps Connector: I would like if you would now talk to one another about what it was like in the early days.

Pat: I can remember being quite impressed with some of the men from New York and Baltimore. They would get pretty forceful in the discussions and I think to a certain extent the women felt they didn't have a chance to talk and I remember Jim Conroy trying to calm the guys down. And he would say, "For the next 15 minutes I want to hear only from the women." These fellows were so dynamic and I was impressed with them. A number of them, as I recall, came from Jesuit high schools or colleges and that was probably what drew them to IVC. Many of them stayed for a number of years. Many are still there.

Madeleine: But you know we have lost the people from Baltimore and they were such a dynamic force, and Barbara was such a powerful individual.

Pat: The other day I went through my files to see if I had kept anything from the older days and I did. I found the original printed application. It was several pages long and her letter to me was signed co-director. I think that's an interesting title. So I am thinking that maybe Charlie hadn't come completely into the picture and Jim needed somebody to really do the ground work. Because as I said earlier when I got to the point of being admitted she brought in a number of folders representing all these organizations in the DC metropolitan area that wanted a volunteer.

Kathleen: In those days Charlie's big gift was gathering together the printouts of all the articles that were used in the discussions at the City Group. Charlie was the poet. I couldn't find any of his poems. Jim and Charlie, the two founders complimented each other. The organization is very fortunate in having them.

Katy: I remember being—I think it was at one of the retreats at Mount Vernon—and it was just after the big stories in Boston about clerical child abuse. We were all in a state of brittle fracture and Jim talked to us. When he told us we were all equally responsible, I don't think I've ever been so angry as I was that day.

Memory Sharing (Continued)

How dare you accuse me of being responsible for clerical abuse. Since then I've come around to understand what he was saying. Oh my, was that an ugly session.

Kathleen: I remember that well. That was also when Jim was breaking people up into small groups and you were volunteering for what group you would like to be in or be facilitator for. I remember no one wanted at that time to lead the group titled "Sympathy for the Abusers." So he said, "Kathleen, why don't you take that group?" It was breathtaking what came out of having to deal with that. In these circumstances you are able to deal with more difficult things that take you deeper than you want to go and think you can't go.

I think the point Pat brought up earlier about the man and woman issue. Baltimore was almost all men and DC was almost all women and I can remember going to a group up in Columbia, MD. It was for what we would call a Day of Reflection and I was shocked when I got into the group to lead it and it was equally men and women. And I went home that night thinking did it make it better or just different? It made it a little more dynamic, not just because the men were better than the women, but the challenge of the different perspectives has been very strong because I think that everything I ever did as a volunteer before than was almost all women. It is different when you have both men and women. I think that was a huge strength of IVC.

Katy: I think the gender differences contributes to the dynamism of the group and the value of the comments that are made and the impression they make on you.

Pat: Historically when I was growing up, retreats were always either men's retreats or women's retreats. The marriage retreats did bring the two together, but I think you still see this separation on the parish level.

Madeleine: I think we depended a lot on the city group leader to quiet down the men and give the women a chance to respond. Sometimes however if you had a weak leader you came away frustrated. There were so many things we had to say but you didn't get a chance to say.

Katy: From my perspective the City Group meetings were a lot more productive in those days. I liked the books we were reading ten years ago than the more recent ones and I can't say why. I can't remember when I stopped being an active member of IVC but I had gotten pretty bored with the books we were reading and in the beginning that was not true.

Kathleen: But what you say is important to make note of. Remember what I just said about early on Charlie Costello had these articles ready for us each month. When they knew that Charlie wasn't going to keep that up any more, a spiritual formation committee was formed. We were asking ourselves what could we do to replace those articles Charlie used to do. That's when the books began. The spiritual formation committee is a group from around the country that will suggest several books and it's a three year cycle: Social Justice, Ignatian Spirituality and Catholic Theology. Yes there have been some books that people haven't liked, some that are challenging. What you say, Katy, is one of my biggest concerns. City Groups are never supposed to turn into a book club. The City Group should be about the service and the book is just supposed to be a springboard toward a discussion, But when the book becomes the most important thing, that is not good. So what you want is prayer, scripture and only partly the book.

Corps Connector: How did Jim and Charlie come to consider including a City Group in creating this organization?

Kathleen: Speaking for them, I think it came from the JVC [Jesuit Volunteer Corps] model. A big part of JVC life is that they live in community and you knew that with IVC you were not going to have people living in community So how else do you form that community? You form it through what they used to call the prelude, the opening retreat, the postlude, the closing retreat and then Orientation is included in there and the City Group, so that you are building a sense of community without living in community. To them the biggest

part of community was faith-sharing, you get that one-on-one but you also do it that in group which is big in the Jesuit community, huge in Jim and Charlie's point of view.

Corps Connector: Kathleen do you know if Jim and Charlie when they decided to have spiritual reflectors if they made a conscious decision to choose you a woman and a lay person.

Kathleen: Absolutely, I would have to say that one of the things I would find absolutely true of the Jesuits that they really do believe in Jesuit-Lay collaboration. I think one of the most empowering things for me personally in IVC is to realize they weren't doing it because there weren't a whole lot of Jesuits around, they were doing it because they knew it was the right thing to do. Another person who was there at that first meeting was Ginny Novak, a spiritual director and leader in the spiritual Exercises and continues with IVC to this day.

The Jesuit Congregation has documents on Jesuit-Lay collaboration and it is not lip service. Is it better if the reflector is a Jesuit? I think we have found over the years in the interview process that when you ask the volunteers coming in do you have a preference for a reflector, we have Jesuits and other order priests we have diocesan priests, religious women, lay women and lay men and they are all trained, do you have a preference? Almost never do they say "Oh it has to be a Jesuit." I think it speaks well for the Jesuits who founded it and the people who are part of it.

Corps Connector: Does anyone have any closing remarks?

Katy: I think all of us in one way or another have emphasized the feeling of closeness that we had in those early days which I suspect was attributable to the size of the organization and the fact that we got to know each other. I think that attention should be made to that in IVC. I think that efforts should be made to compensate for the increase in the size of the organization to recreate the feeling of warmth, camaraderie and close association that we had in the early days I don't have any answers as to how we can accomplish this and keep on growing.

Pat: I wonder if any thought has ever been given like to have a nation-wide conference. Invite all groups to assemble together and have a couple of days of conferences and programs that would renew the spirit on an individual basis, that would share from one group to another, sharing amongst the group members as well as between the groups. I think that would be something to aspire to.

Corps Connector: Kathleen, you have the final word.

Kathleen: Pat, I think in your answer to Katy's question that something like a nation-wide meeting has come up, but you worry about the expense of people traveling, where would there be a central spot. We're very East Coast people, we think everyone would come here. Then you realize that some people are active in California, some in the middle of the country. I think it has only been about three years since we've had the entire east coast get-together which was at Chestnut Hill.



I guess I'm more in favor of growth only because the bottom line always has to be about the people who need to be served. Like Jesus said: "The harvest is great but the laborers are few." I think the need is never going to get less. And if we don't continue to prepare people. I don't know of any other volunteer group that can say their people have been working for ten to twelve years non-stop. The rest we can figure out, how to get that camaraderie, how to inspire each other. The numbers have to grow but we have to be incredibly careful about quality control, not to grow just to be growing.

