

# The Jesuit Collaborative

*Building a network of people involved in Ignatian spiritual ministries*

*by Fr. Ronald Mercier, SJ*

The challenges facing the spiritual ministries sponsored by the Society of Jesus in the northeastern United States can sound depressingly familiar: reduced numbers of Jesuits, the need to provide some kind of firm financial foundation for the future, the current difficulties experienced by the Catholic faith community, the duplication of initiatives in spirituality often concentrated within the traditional urban hubs of the Northeast. Were one to stop there, one could simply end up shaking one's head.

Yet, more startling in many ways have been the signs of new life in unexpected quarters. The rapid rise of lay persons interested in Ignatian



Early edition of the Spiritual Exercises

spirituality has caught the attention of many. Yet, this interest lies not only in a traditional sense of people seeking to do Ignatian

retreats or pursue spiritual direction; there is a hunger for formation in the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius' great gift to the Jesuits and the Church, as Pope Benedict recently noted. People have sought to be formed to give the Exercises to others and to help them develop their faith lives. This interest transcends the usual areas and institutions within which Jesuits minister; it encompasses the whole of the Northeast, emerges from the social and ethnic groups often underserved by the Society, and seeks new forms appropriate to a diversity of experiences. The challenge – and the opportunity – can be humbling and exhilarating at the same time.

In response to the challenges and the opportunities, the Jesuits of the Maryland, New England and New York Provinces have

launched a bold initiative entitled the “Jesuit Collaborative.” The idea arose from a strategic planning process in the New England Province, but Fr. Tom Regan, SJ, Provincial, saw the need for a broader scope of activity and sought the cooperation of Frs. Tim Brown, SJ, Provincial of Maryland, and Jeff Chojnacki, SJ, Provincial of New York. Together they launched a planning process ably led by Fr. Walter Smith, SJ, president of the HealthCare Chaplaincy in New York City, a process which involved Jesuits, religious women, and crucially, lay collaborators, all experienced in the Exercises. The process bore fruit and led on July 31, 2006, to the creation of the Jesuit Collaborative, the first joint ministry of the three Provinces, with the appointment of Frs. Jim Connors, SJ from the Maryland province, Ed Quinnan, SJ from the New York province, Ron Mercier, SJ and Sr. Clare Walsh, M.H.S.H from the New England province to implement the vision.

## Priorities of the Jesuit Collaborative

The Jesuit Collaborative has set the following priorities for itself, seeking both to build on the strong legacy of the work of the three Provinces, and to meet new opportunities.

- To build a network of persons involved in Ignatian spiritual ministries stretching from

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## *There is a hunger for the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius' great gift to the Jesuits and the Church*

Maine to North Carolina, so as to improve sharing of ideas and resources, with special attention to retreat centers;

- To provide opportunities for training people to give the Spiritual Exercises, especially in the “retreat in everyday life” mode, with possible initiatives in:
    - programs for giving the Exercises involving combinations of on-site and distance education;
    - development of supervision, support and on-going formation resources for those working in this area;
  - To ensure the quality of Ignatian spiritual ministries, their fidelity to the spirit of St. Ignatius, and their ability to meet emerging needs of various communities;
  - To work with Jesuit institutions in fostering an Ignatian identity among those responsible for carrying the ministries into the future;
  - To foster research and publication on Ignatian spirituality, especially with an eye toward providing practical supports for persons engaged in the ministry;
  - To meet and foster the emerging desire for personal and spiritual growth among Catholics by nurturing new forms of outreach, especially to areas and communities to which Jesuits have not usually ministered.
- An initial commitment of the three provinces to provide Ignatian outreach to Hispanic Catholics has begun, involving Frs. Jack Fagan, SJ and Bill Rickle, SJ.

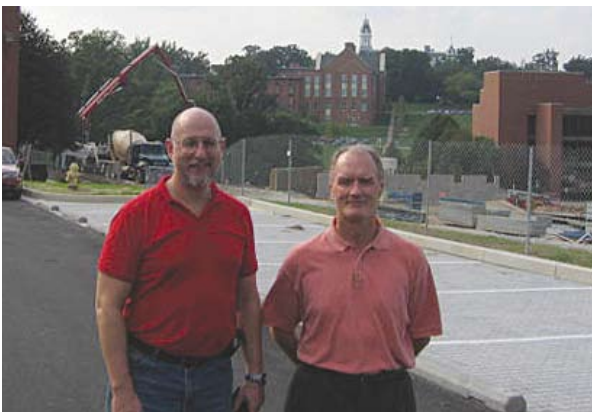
Obviously the scope of these activities is very broad; the initial strategic plan foresees work over five years. A Board of Trustees will be formed during the fall to oversee this work. Coupled with this work, though, there will have to be an intensive program of fund raising to support the existing and new ministries and to guarantee the Jesuit Collaborative's ability to reach out to those who lack the financial resources to participate but who have great gifts of heart, mind, and spirit.



Sr. Clare Walsh, MSHS, Associate Director and Fr. Ron Mercier, SJ, Director of the Jesuit Collaborative, at the McDavitt Center.

Identifying and promoting leadership within these groups would be one of the priorities for the Collaborative, keeping in mind the commitments of the Jesuits to promotion of a faith that does justice.

We plan to communicate regularly with you on the progress of the Jesuit Collaborative. Perhaps you would like to participate in this new path for spreading the Ignatian vision in some way. If so, please contact us [Collaborative@sjnen.org](mailto:Collaborative@sjnen.org). We ask your prayers and your support so that Ignatius' vision of a committed love for Christ and service of the Church in the world can touch many more hearts. ✝



Fr. Bill Rickle, SJ and Fr. Jack Fagan, SJ at Loyola College, Baltimore, meeting on a Hispanic ministry initiative for the Jesuit Collaborative.