



# Jesuit Attorneys, *Finding God in the Fine Print* by William Bole

Among the things that shall always be with us are jokes about lawyers—ribbings like, “Have you heard about the lawyer’s word processor?” Punch line: “No matter what font you select, everything comes out in fine print.”



Fr. James F. Walsh, SJ

Lawyers have heard them all, but they probably haven’t heard this one: What do you get when you cross a Jesuit priest with a lawyer? The answer is somebody like Fr. James F. Walsh, SJ, a member of both the Society of Jesus and the Massachusetts Bar Association.

“Jesuit lawyer—it sounds like an oxymoron,” Fr. Walsh says in good humor. But he and some other Jesuits are showing that the practice of law is simply another way of finding God in all things—including the fine print.

On a pleasant July day, Fr. Walsh was seen striding into St. Mary’s Hall, the Jesuit residence at Boston College, with a manila envelope tucked under his arm. He was dropping

off legal papers for a fellow member of the New England Province who is launching a Catholic liturgical association.

Helping nonprofit groups incorporate is just part of Fr. Walsh’s legal ministry. A solo practitioner with offices in Canton, Massachusetts, and at the Province’s headquarters in Watertown, his clients also include elderly people who need help with estate planning as they prepare to enter nursing homes, and recently homeless people who need help managing their money. His one-man law firm is self-supporting, with fees offered by clients who are able to pay.

He doesn’t sport a Roman collar when meeting with clients, nearly all of whom know he’s a priest, and certainly not when appearing before a judge, many of whom don’t know. “I shouldn’t be able to influence a decision just because I’m a priest,” Fr. Walsh explained in an interview in the garden alongside St. Mary’s at Boston College (from which he received his law degree in 1981).

According to the Jesuit Conference in Washington, D.C.,

# The professional part of our life is not separate from the faith part—it can all be integrated.

approximately 75 Jesuits nationwide have law degrees, though a much smaller number are working full-time as attorneys.

Here in New England, Fr. Walsh is one of several Jesuits who have either practiced law or taught law school including: Fr. Robert Araujo, Fr. Frederick Enman, Fr. Francis Herrmann, Fr. Gregory Kalscheur, Fr. James Malley, Fr. Francis Nicholson, and Fr. Dennis Yesalonia.

For many years, Fr. Dennis J. Yesalonia, SJ, did lawyerly things. He served during the 1990s as the first general counsel of Boston College, and more recently as the first general counsel of the College of the Holy Cross (in both cases, the institutions

had previously used outside legal counsel). Now, he draws on those skills as the New England Province's treasurer, which involves legal-related responsibilities such as preparing



Fr. Dennis Yesalonia, SJ

financial reports.

"Everything we do is a form of ministry," says the priest, referring to all Jesuit assignments, including his own.

His office at the Province is decorated in part with degrees from Catholic institutions such as Notre Dame, where he earned his law degree in 1974, and with a certificate of admission to the Bar of the Supreme

Court of the United States, entitling him to argue a case before the high court (which he has never done). In his work as a Jesuit lawyer, including a stint with a Boston law firm, Fr. Yesalonia has aimed to set an example of courtesy, respect, and civility—notably toward opposing lawyers—in a profession known for its adversarial relationships.

"It's all about people and their dignity," says Fr. Yesalonia, a member of the New England Province, invoking the Jesuit principle of *cura personalis*: care for the person.

Jesuit lawyers take different paths to this untypical ministry.

Some, like Fr. Yesalonia, started out as attorneys before entering the Society. Others, like Fr. Walsh, came to the law through their Jesuit work. In his case, he was working as a community organizer in Boston in the early 1970s, when he encountered public-interest lawyers and saw how the law could serve as a powerful tool for promoting social justice—a key thrust of contemporary Jesuit mission.

Of course, a Jesuit lawyer can do things other lawyers can't do. For example, over the years Fr. Walsh has presided at the funerals of dozens of his elderly clients.

At the same time, these Jesuits are quick to say that all lawyers can carry an Ignatian spirit into their work (and many do). Fr. Gregory A. Kalscheur, SJ, brings the message to students at



Fr. Gregory Kalscheur, SJ

Boston College Law School, where he has taught for the past five years (he was ordained in 2001, in the Maryland Province).

A 1988 graduate of the University of Michigan Law School, Fr. Kalscheur invites his students to reflect on why they're pursuing the law and "what kind of a person they're becoming" as they grapple with the rules of civil procedure and constitutional law (two required subjects he teaches). Those are distinctly Ignatian practices of reflection.

"We're trying to help students recognize that the professional part of their lives isn't separate from the faith part," he says of the law school's approach. "It can all be integrated."

And that's no joke.



Download Fr. Kalscheur's article: "Ignatian Spirituality and the Life of the Lawyer: Finding God in All Things—Even in the Ordinary Practice of Law" at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=903161>