



# A Conversation with Fr. Jim Shaughnessy, SJ

by Grace Cotter Regan

Fr. James M. Shaughnessy, SJ, serves as chaplain at Tufts Medical Center and I had the opportunity to get a sense of his work and vocation. Fr. Shaughnessy is a Jesuit priest and a chaplain, but his world is comprised of concentric circles on many levels: He is an organizer, advisor, mentor, coach, ethicist, counselor and friend.

It's 3:00 a.m. and the phone rings in his room at Loyola House, the Jesuit residence in downtown Boston. For this chaplain, his night's sleep is likely over as he heads for the hospital . . . to bring the strength of the sacraments but also to bring his comfort, care and concern to a family, a patient and the doctors and nurses.

"With you always" is a Jesuit motto and he believes his work is to journey with his companions: hospital administrators, physicians, nurses, interns, residents, patients and their families, as well as the folks on the street who find their way to the emergency room. As he describes it, "There is a dignity in all care—and justice is critical to the journey. I cry at my job daily and I don't apologize about it."

Fr. Jim Shaughnessy has spent over 25 years in this work. He consults on medical ethics, facilitates monthly support groups and works

with colleague Patricia Aye, RN, BSN, on the Kenneth Schwartz Public Dialogue, a multidisciplinary forum where caregivers discuss difficult emotional and social issues. Over 37,000 clinicians at 195 sites in 31 states across the country participate and share their experiences and feelings. It allows physicians to talk about why they were called to their medical vocation and the real work they do.

Province friend and infectious disease specialist Helen Boucher, MD, works as a colleague and partner with the Ethics Commission and has shared

her work in Haiti as part of the Schwartz Grand Rounds.

Fr. Shaughnessy explains that the medical world has been challenged to a new accountability by the public. Physicians are not always able to tell their story. . . there can be a sense of public distrust or scrutiny and physicians are hesitant to talk about what they do. Fr. Shaughnessy's charge is to restore people's trust—to enable physicians to do what they do well.

The role of the chaplain is to use every means possible to bring together the patient, family members and the medical team in the best interests of the patient and good medicine. This often results in a

conversation helping to understand that it is time to let nature take its course with end of life.

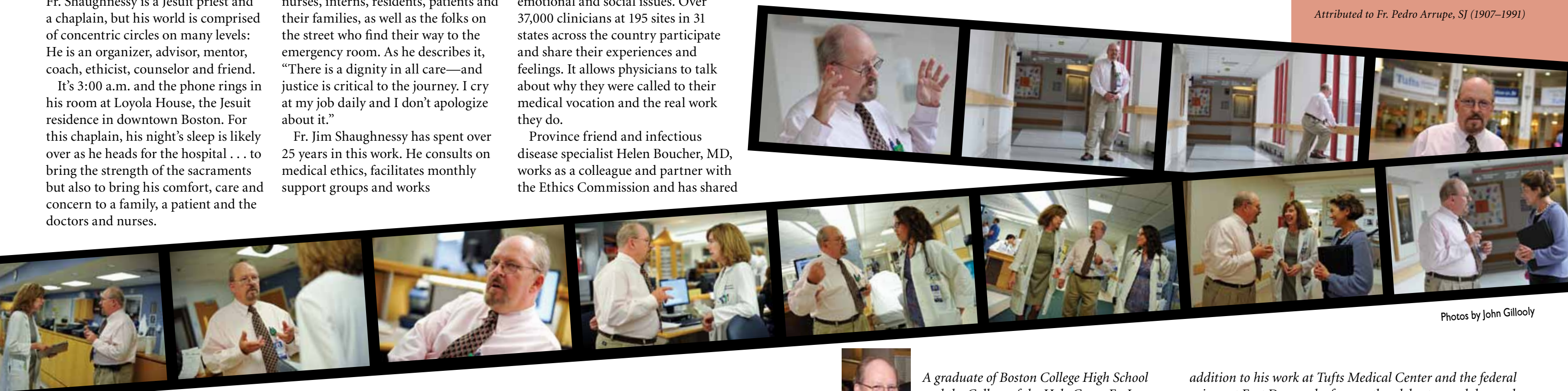
How does Fr. Shaughnessy feed his soul? Prison chaplaincy at Fort Devens has been a powerful experience for him. Surrounded by smart, successful people who made bad choices, he calls on Ignatian prayer and imagination, helping prisoners to discover their faith and to resolve their bad choices.

He loves the shore and the city, so biking to the hospital along the Charles River helps him to be alone and focused. I asked Fr. Shaughnessy, at age 60, what is important? He stopped and reflected and quoted Pedro Arrupe's poem, *Falling in Love*.

## Falling in Love

Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Attributed to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907–1991)



Photos by John Gillooly



A graduate of Boston College High School and the College of the Holy Cross, Fr. James M. Shaughnessy, SJ, entered the Jesuits in 1971 and was ordained a priest in 1979. In

addition to his work at Tufts Medical Center and the federal prison at Fort Devens, he frequently celebrates weekday and weekend Masses at St. Cecilia Parish, Boston.