



*First-year novice Andrew Wawrzyn, nSJ, worked in a soup kitchen at Chicago's St. Procopius Church.*

# The Novitiate

## The First Step in Jesuit Life

**I**N THE MIDDLE OF A QUIET, working-class suburb of Detroit stands a modest, unpretentious building. The unadorned, two-story, red brick former convent built in the 1950s is sheltered by a flat, tar roof, blending the structure sedately into the surrounding neighborhood. At first one might have expected a far more conspicuous dwelling to serve as the first home of those who begin life as a Jesuit. Unassuming Loyola House in Berkley, Michigan, is the Jesuit novitiate of the Chicago and Detroit Provinces.

The simple nature of Loyola House is almost symbolic in its role as novices explore life as members of the Society. Upon completing their initial interviews, it is here that

they embark on a two-year pilgrimage of prayer, study, and work, following in the footsteps of St. Ignatius Loyola. "The novitiate is a time when one experiences a first immersion in Jesuit community life and in the mission of the Society of Jesus," says Richard McGurn, SJ, Chicago Province assistant for formation. The result of this first path of Jesuit formation is the pronouncing of perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as either a Jesuit brother or scholastic. And their commitment to these ideals is anything but simple.

How these men find their way to the Society is a lesson in diversity. With an average age of 28, some of the present novices were members of a Jesuit parish or educated in

by Lynn Marasovich Shankman



*Guiding novices in spiritual growth is the responsibility of (right) Tim Shepard, SJ, director of novices, and (left) Mark Andrews, SJ, assistant director of novices.*

Jesuit schools, but many had no prior contact with Jesuit institutions. Some were accountants, bankers, public administrators, or community activists. Some even researched the Society through the Internet. Regardless of how they arrived at the front door, the men all agree that once they enter the comfortably modest Loyola House, they enter a community of fellowship and spirituality unlike anything experienced before.

Guiding this journey are Timothy Shepard, SJ, director of novices from the Detroit Province, and Mark Andrews, SJ, assistant director of novices from the Chicago Province. Loyola House is a bi-province Jesuit community, and both Tim and Mark divide the direction of 13 novices without regard to Province lines. "We find this approach helps to broaden the sense of community and balance for the novices," says Mark.

During their two years at Loyola House, the novices' curriculum can be described as a series of milestones, each bearing a specific lesson or preparation for a fulfilling life in the Society of Jesus. "In early formation, the Society helps a novice understand who we are," says Mark. "Prayer, living the life of the vows, and giving ourselves in direct service

to the Church and the Society assists in determining if a novice can lead a happy and productive Jesuit life."

Financially supported entirely by the Society through the Jesuit Seminary Fund, the novices are intentionally free from worldly concerns in order to concentrate on the Ignatian vision of prayer, ministry, and community life.

The view of Loyola House from some of the Society's supporters is inspiring. "We are taught that we are our brother's keeper," says benefactor Carol Thaman of Cincinnati, Ohio, who recently visited the novitiate. Carol's brother, David Stagaman, SJ, entered the Society of Jesus in 1953. "Then, the novices seemed isolated from the world; they were out in the country by themselves. Today, they seem more in touch with the world around them. They are young men praying, traveling, studying, and serving."

Bob and Betty Schoettinger agree. "We saw a tremendous generosity and determination to serve God and the Church," noted Bob after returning from a visit to the novitiate. "Everything from the bricks of the building to the altar in the chapel room confirmed a sense of community."

## The First Year

### The First Month— Living in Community

Settling into life at Loyola House is a time to become members of this community, to become familiar with religious life by studying the meaning of the vows through course work and prayer. This is accomplished through sessions of communal gatherings and various forms of prayer. Many novices claim they form lasting and close friendships during their important first month.

### The Hospital Experiment

The next milestone, called the hospital experiment, finds the novices serving as hands-on orderlies and nursing assistants in either an urban Detroit hospital or at the Franklin Hospice, a refuge for people with AIDS and cancer. Here, their first taste of active ministry and physical care of the poor and suffering takes place. They do everything from changing beds to running errands to pastoral ministry. "I was involved in volunteer work for years be-

fore entering,” observes first-year novice, Andrew Wawrzyn, nSJ. “The hospital experiment is really rewarding and offers a wonderful opportunity to begin practicing ministry skills.”

### **The Spiritual Exercises**

More than any other experience, according to Mark Andrews, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius provide “a pivotal point of discernment or clarification for the novices to explore more deeply where God may be leading them.” The traditional month-long, guided retreat involves individual silent prayer in a series of meditations on the scriptures. In the words of Rick McGurn, “The heart of the novitiate experience is the 30-day retreat — making the Spiritual Exercises — and in the months that follow, seeing how the grace of the retreat is tested and confirmed in a variety of ministry experiments.”

“There is an incredible freedom that comes from taking a month out of your life to pray with Christ. I really enjoyed this freedom from distraction and logistics,” says second-year novice Mike Conley, nSJ. The experience is a profoundly moving one. “At the end of the 30 days,” Mike continues, “I realized that I was still a spiritual beginner, but with a more directed focus on a personal relationship with Jesus.”

### **The Short Experiment**

To test their ministerial wings, novices are provided the opportunity in the second semester to engage in practical ministry outside Loyola House. A variety of assignments are suggested by the novitiate staff. Ministering in a Chicago community where one’s own language is not the native language of the congregation, offering a caring ear to homeless runaways in a faraway city, or performing ecological advocacy work in the Appalachian East brings a wealth of inspirational experiences for the novices.

Assisting battered women and children was part of the experiment selected by William Murphy, nSJ, a novice from the Chicago Province. Bill now more fully recognizes the significance of working with women’s issues, not only for himself, but also for the Society. “We are at an important moment in the Church on these issues,” he says. “I have learned so much about the effects of domestic violence. This experience has been invaluable from that perspective.”

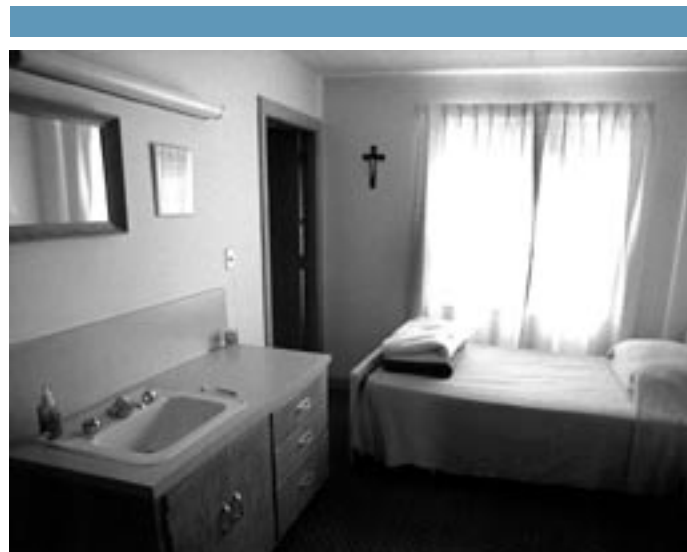
### **Summers**

One of the more enlightening activities, accomplished during alternating summers, is the study of Jesuit history and learning to converse in Spanish, the Society’s second language in the United States. Last summer, Regis University in Denver, Colorado, hosted novices from across the country to hear historians such as John Padberg, SJ, and Vincent O’Keefe, SJ, the former general assistant to the late Superior General Pedro Arrupe, SJ. “As I listened to these presentations, I was so proud to be a part of this group,” remarked Mike Conley, nSJ. “They generously gave us stimulating examples from Jesuit tradition and history. It was a most enlightening experience for us all.”

## **The Second Year**

### **First Semester**

In addition to getting back into an academic rhythm by taking courses at the University of Detroit Mercy, the new Jesuits also explore the Society’s commitment to the Service of Faith and Promotion of Justice. “The goal is to integrate their studies and ministry placement with this ideal of faith and justice,” says Mark Andrews, SJ. One novice offered pastoral care in a juvenile treatment center for young women. The role included conducting communion services and offering guidance and support.



*A typical room at the novitiate is simple and free from distractions.*



### **The Long Experiment— The Spring Experience**

Second semester finds most of the novices embarking on an extended apostolic experience, the “long experiment,” as it’s called at Loyola House. They are sent to many and varied placements around the Midwest. Some serve as chaplains, working with seriously ill children and their families; some conduct youth retreats. “This experiment, more than any other, is a practical, hands-on ministry,” says Mark. “They seriously explore the most suitable circumstances to complement their intensive experience of the 30-day retreat.”

Mike Conley, nSJ, shared a teaching position at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois. “I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction with students,” he says. Mike’s background was in the financial world, and when he helped out at Loyola Academy, he felt more connected with people and with God.

While one might not think such an ordinary building would be the site of profound growth and preparation, perhaps it is precisely because of its intended nature that Loyola House is anything but simple—especially when one considers those who it warmly welcomes. Perhaps Betty Schoettinger summarized it best, “I’m happy and excited for the future of the Society of Jesus and the Church.”



*Novice Mike Conley, nSJ, helped teach world history to freshmen at Loyola Academy in Wilmette, Illinois, as part of his long experiment.*



*Loyola House is home for Jesuit novices from the Chicago and Detroit Provinces.*