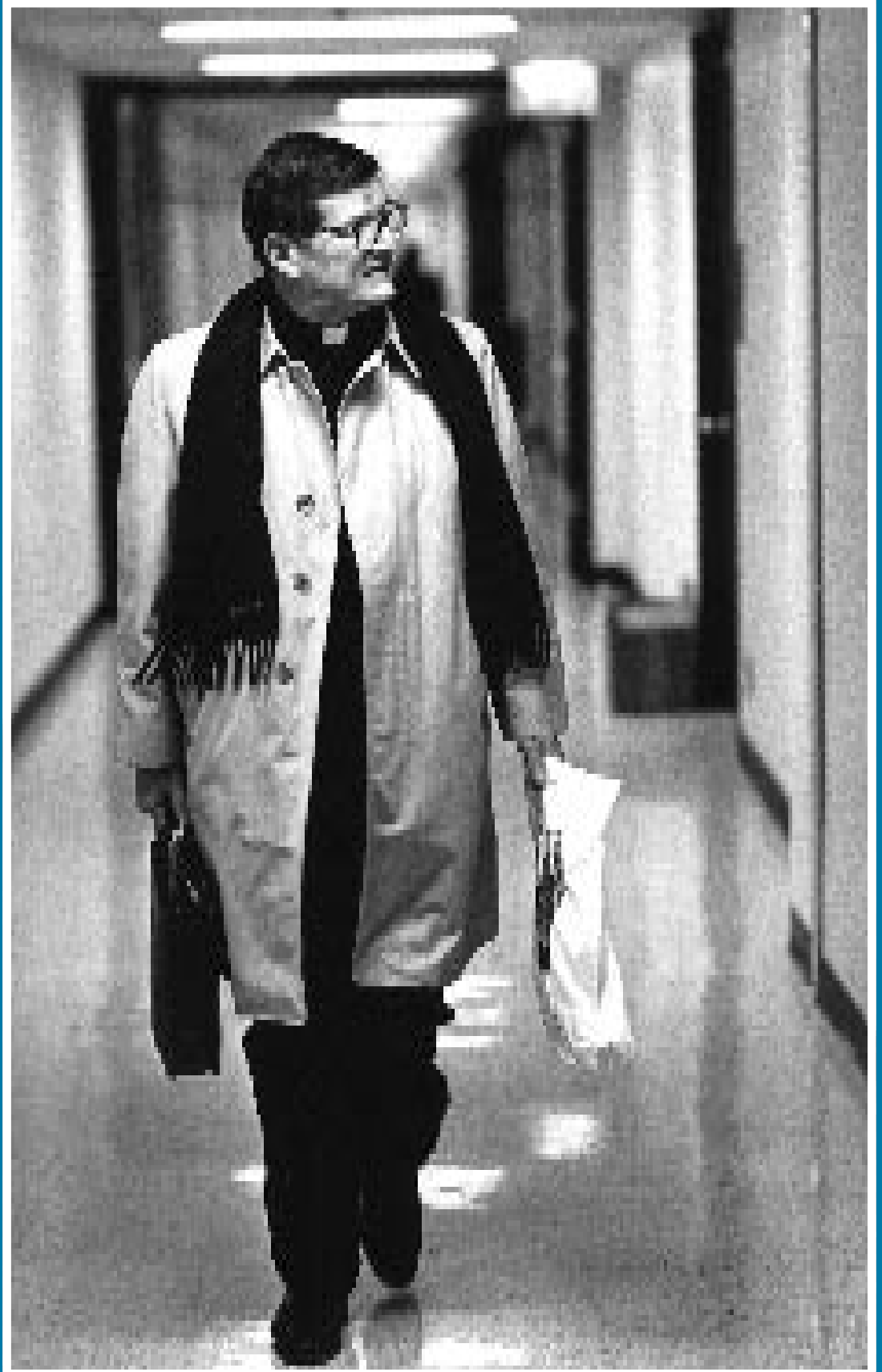


PHOTO BY STEVE DOWNSCH

Father O'Callaghan
walks the halls of the
medical center
as he makes his way
toward his office.





Teaching and Learning to Take Time to Reflect

by Brigid K. Barry

FR. JOHN J. O'CALLAGHAN, SJ, is sitting in his sparsely decorated office at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois, explaining in great detail to a visitor the rather complicated process the Society of Jesus undertakes in order to call a General Congregation when he is interrupted by his ringing phone. Excusing himself, he answers it, and begins a spirited discussion with the caller about why she should use ricotta rather than Parmesan cheese in a dish she's preparing. After hanging up, he turns back to his visitor and, without missing a beat, continues his discourse about the General Congregation.

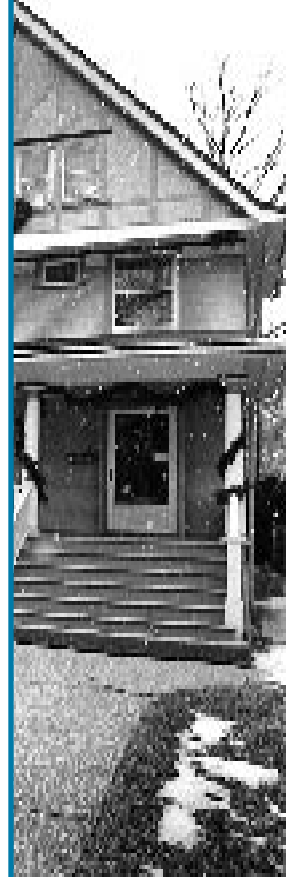
Fr. O'Callaghan, who recently returned from 12 years in Rome where he was assistant to the Superior General of the Jesuits, claims still to be adjusting to the slower-paced life of a medical-center chaplain. Some people are harder to slow down than others.

Born 64 years ago in New York, Fr. O'Callaghan says he always thought, in the back of his mind, that he had a vocation to the priesthood. He knew of Jesuits partly because he had an uncle who was a Jesuit in the New York Province. Later, he talked to his guidance counselor at St. Xavier High School (run by the Xavierian Brothers) in Louisville, Kentucky (where his family moved when he was 11 years old), about a vocation. The guidance counselor gave him no other option.

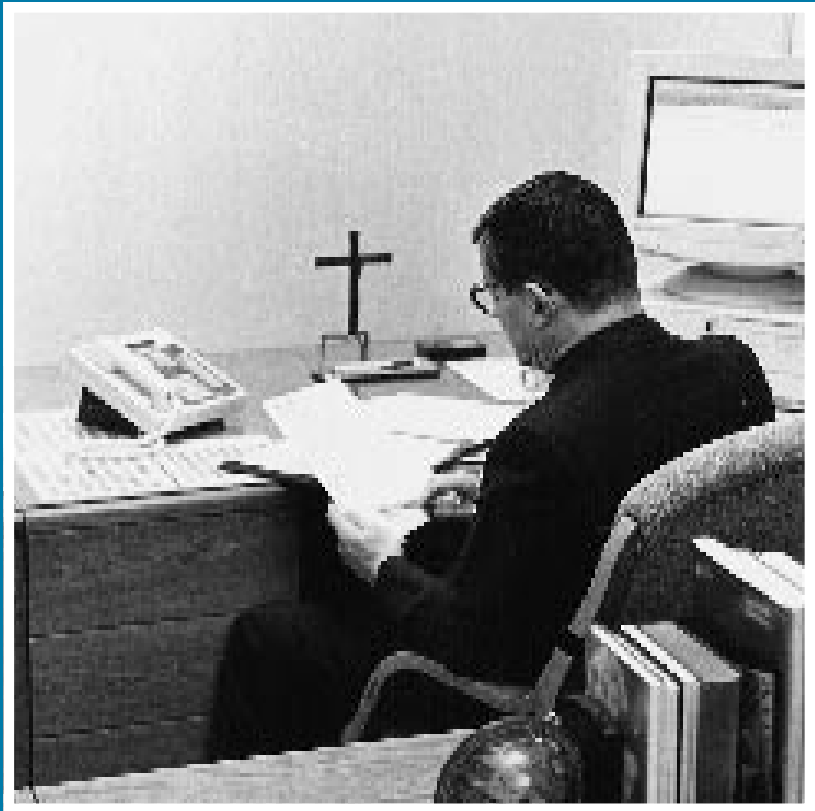
"I told him, 'Brother, I've got this thought in the back of my mind that I want to become a Jesuit,'" Fr. O'Callaghan recalls. "He didn't hesitate. He told me I should write a letter to the Jesuits that night, and when I got to school in the morning, he



Father O'Callaghan shows off the new Jesuit residence, Zeitler House, in Oak Park, Illinois. The residence will house Jesuits working and studying at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood, Illinois.



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Father O'Callaghan catches up on some desk work in his office at the Loyola University Medical Center.

would look it over and mail it. The next thing I knew, I was entering the door at Milford (the former Chicago Province novitiate in Ohio)."

His career has included stints as a teacher and rector at the former Jesuit theologate in Chicago and as secretary of formation and then president of the Jesuit Conference, the coordinating body of the United States Jesuits.

Making Decisions Affecting Jesuits

In 1983, during the Jesuits' 33rd General Congregation, Fr. O'Callaghan was elected to the post of General Assistant. So he packed up, left Washington, D.C., and moved to Rome, where he served as one of the four Jesuits responsible for advising Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach

in his daily administration of the Society of Jesus.

His job description as General Assistant was deceptively simple—he, along with four other Jesuits, was to advise the General on matters concerning the international Society of Jesus. But that entailed digging daily into the complex social and political situations Jesuits faced all over the world, not to mention the endless parade of personnel decisions that must be made while running a 23,000-member religious order.

"We would meet at 8 a.m. six days a week," Fr. O'Callaghan says. "The meeting would last a half hour to an hour, and Fr. Kolvenbach would tell us about who and what was happening in the provinces. Once a week we would have an official, formal meeting where we would consider pro-

posals or give our opinions on particular issues, like who would be provincial of a particular province, for example.

“Fr. Kolvenbach is a consistent, fair, and prudent man. He would make sure we had a consensus before he made a decision. By the time a matter came up to be decided upon, we had usually discussed it enough so that each of us was able to make a good, informed judgment. I can think of very few situations in the 12 years I was there that we didn’t come to a complete consensus.”

Change in Politics, Change in the Church

While Fr. O’Callaghan was in Rome, he saw political and social changes around the world that profoundly affected the Church and, therefore, the Society of Jesus. During his tenure, the Iron Curtain came down, revealing a clergy that had been operating in secret for 40 years. There were civil wars and social movements that put Jesuits in danger and in some cases made it impossible for them to maintain their ministries. There were also areas of great growth—the Church in Asia and Africa was growing as well as in other parts of the Third World.

When the Jesuits called the 34th General Congregation last year, it was a legal necessity because each religious order needed to bring its own governing laws into step with the newly revised Code of Canon Law. During the Congregation, the Jesuits went beyond those legal obligations and issued documents on, among other things, women, the laity, and evangelization. Fr. O’Callaghan points out that the makeup of the General Congregation reflected the population changes of the Society of Jesus itself.

“There were 223 delegates and this was the first time in the history of the Jesuits that there were more delegates who were from areas other than Western Europe or North America,” he says. “In 1965, 75% of the delegates came from Europe and North America; in 1975, 65% did; and in 1995 it was 51%. The shift is east and south—Asia, Africa, and Latin America.”

Because the Society of Jesus is a mirror of the people it serves, delegates came to this congregation with widely different agendas and ideas. “The typical Eastern European Catholic today feels a bit like Rip Van Winkle in the wider Church,” Fr. O’Callaghan says. “While they had been locked behind the Iron Curtain, the face of

the Church had changed almost completely. Some of the delegates to the congregation couldn’t really relate to some of the things we talked about, like the role of women in the Church. That issue is not the same reality for them. When the documents said we should listen to women, some Eastern Europeans said, ‘But our women aren’t saying anything!’”

The Latin Americans and Africans also faced a similar situation. Fr. O’Callaghan says, “Some of them pointed out to us that many of these issues are simply not important to them. How can people worry about some of these things when they are worried about their next meal? They are scrambling for their lives, and we’re talking about lay collaboration. So you have to be as sensitive as you can to everyone’s situation, and it takes a wide view of the world to be able to do that.”

New Ways of Talking

The Congregation calls us to a new way of talking to each other,” he went on. “The values in the post-modern world pose a big challenge. We have to look at ourselves, our communities, and our ministries across the boundaries of religion and culture. The U.S. Jesuits in particular have to get some perspective. We are so easily insulated from what’s going on around the world. It’s so easy for us to think that the United States is the world and, boy, it sure isn’t.”

Fr. O’Callaghan thinks it is to have Jesuits in formation get as much cross-cultural training as they can. “You have to live in another place, not as an observer, but as someone who is involved in the culture. You can learn French here, but it’s a completely different thing to live in France. Jesuits need to do that because by our nature we’re all part of a bigger mission than just what’s right in our back yards.”

One of the big issues discussed at the Congregation was how to increase the Jesuits’ involvement with the laity in the face of the declining numbers of clergy. Fr. O’Callaghan points out that the United States is far ahead of much of the Jesuit world when it comes to working closely with lay people.

“We have lay people running our schools, we are collaborating with lay people in our parishes and retreat houses, there is just the sense that we are sharing much of our ministry with the laity.”

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Looking at Lay Collaboration

As with the other issues facing the Congregation, the idea of lay collaboration had to be looked at from many different sides. "In Italy, for example, the situation between priest and laity is very vertical, with the priest being at the top," Fr. O'Callaghan says. "But you have to recognize that it's vertical from both sides—the laity take the same view.

"On the other hand, you have the situation in Africa where much of the Church is relatively young. That makes for still another relationship between clergy and lay people, and our U.S. experience doesn't always match it."

Fr. O'Callaghan finds himself testing this idea of working with the laity as he tries to establish himself as a presence at Loyola University Medical Center. He is there primarily to minister to those in the medical school, but he also tries to reach out to the rest of the medical-center community as well.

"It's a challenge—they're all so busy. It's a question of how best to reach out to them."

It's quite a change from the regimented, high-stress situation he left in Rome. "I find myself doing a lot of peripheral work. The Ministry Team calls it loitering with intent. I try to be there if someone needs me, to be present. I'm hoping to work with the faculty, the students and eventually the residents, but in order to reach those people, you have to have a certain credibility, and by being present I'm slowly gaining that."

He is currently teaching an elective course on ethics and has given a seminar on the Jesuit vision and tradition at the medical center. "It's important to try to reinforce the Jesuit tradition of reflectivity, especially since no one in this setting has much time. There's a great peril in not taking the time out to reflect. Jesuits and their colleagues find the institutions plunging ahead, and themselves flying along behind them instead of charting the course to reach the goals they want."

New Ministry, New Home

Fr. O'Callaghan is also breaking new ground by being one of three Jesuits in residence at a brand-new community in Oak Park, Illinois, located near the medical center. He and New England Jesuit Fr. Myles Sheehan, who is a doctor on staff at Loyola, and Wisconsin Jesuit



Fr. O'Callaghan chats with Gregory Holt, a second-year MDPH student.

Fr. Kevin Fitzgerald, who is about to take up research and teaching at the medical center, are working to make it home.

"It's too small, especially after coming from the big community in Rome. But I'm back in Chicago, where I know many people, and we're hoping to be joined soon by another Jesuit to make a foursome."

Fr. O'Callaghan plans to increase the visibility of his job. "I want to help strengthen the key elements of Jesuit tradition at the medical center. Among them are genuine competence and a personal touch. Loyola has a solid history, but to preserve it, we need to continually ask ourselves why and how we're doing what we're doing. We need to have some sort of communal discernment if we're going to be at our best. And that's what we're trying to do."

That's the hallmark of Fr. O'Callaghan. Always trying to do his best. 