

A Company of Quiet Companions

by Jeremy Langford

BEHIND THE SCENES AND WITHOUT FANFARE, THE MEMBERS OF FABER JESUIT COMMUNITY IN CINCINNATI ARE MAKING A PROFOUND DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES



Peter Faber's charism as the "quiet companion" flows through the Jesuit community in Cincinnati that is named after him. Founded in 1990, the Faber Jesuit Community is located just down the street from Xavier University but, by design, is not affiliated with the school or any particular institution. The 13 current members of this apostolic house serve in more than a dozen ministries and service agencies combined. Like Faber, though they are highly trained and have been leaders in various Jesuit ministries, they humbly share God's love with others and serve those in need in many ways: stocking shelves at a food pantry, cleaning the homes of elderly shut-ins, bringing the Eucharist to patients in hospitals and nursing homes, doing the laundry for the homeless, and helping addicts get sober. Unlike Faber, who in 1546 died of exhaustion at the age of 40, most of the members of this community are in their 70s and 80s and show few signs of slowing down.

"This is a diverse group of very generous people who want to be of service and are willing to be placed with people who are in pain, wounded, marginalized, in great need, or lonely," says Fr. John Ferone, SJ, superior of the Faber Jesuit Com-

munity (as well as the Milford Jesuit Community). "For most of us, the heart of our work is a ministry of presence and hospitality."

The colorful, warm Faber residence mirrors this hospitality. "Part of my ministry," says Fr. Ferone, "is to care for the caregivers. I want to create an atmosphere that is relaxing, where people can come home and know they are appreciated." "Another part of my role," he adds, "is to accompany the men as they age and transition from active ministry to a more contemplative life of prayer. I say that, yet I don't see them transitioning out of the active life very often! All the same, I think it's important for this home to keep its members in touch with their senses and Ignatius's concept of finding God in all things through colors, food, music, gardens, the chapel, books, and anything that helps them enjoy (to live 'in joy') God's creation and share it with others."

Because a picture says a thousand words, *Partners* photographed some of the quiet companions of the Faber community in action. Taken together, the images that follow create a mosaic that reveals the lasting impact these Jesuit priests and brothers are making in a wide range of people's lives.



FR. JOHN FERONE enjoys the view of Cincinnati from atop the Faber residence. At 53, he is the youngest member of both communities he oversees as superior. The whale weather vein, which Fr. Ferone refers to as “Ishmael” from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, is one of the many eclectic pieces he has placed on the outdoor decks and throughout the house. “I like to play,” he says. “I love it when someone in the community is surprised by a new ceramic frog on the patio or gets a chuckle out of something in the house. Many of the pictures in this house have a humorous message; for example, in ‘The Legend of St. Brendan,’ Brendan and two companions set sail from Ireland to spread the gospel when one night their boat runs aground. One of the men wonders why the stars keep moving, and as it turns out they are riding on the back of a whale. The painting is a reminder that just when we think we are grounded, we may be moving in ways we don’t yet recognize.”

“Fr. Ferone’s gift is that he is a conduit for the Holy Spirit to work in people’s lives.”

—Dianne Jaeger, friend of Fr. Ferone



FR. ROBERT HAGEE enjoys reading on the patio of the Faber residence. The Cincinnati native graduated from St. Xavier High School in 1946 and entered the Jesuits the next year. In 1955, he was assigned to serve in India, where he was ordained in 1961 and, over 35 years, worked with the poor and helped establish schools in Buxar, Bakhtiyarpur, Jamalpur, and taught at St. Xavier's School in Jaipur, Rajasthan. "In India I learned about what it means to be poor and what the poor can teach us about goodness and generosity," explains Fr. Hagee, who joined the Faber community in 1992 and is the sacristan for the house chapel. "My ministry now is to visit the elderly at two nursing homes that cater to the poor: Garden Park Nursing Home and Clover Nook Health Care Pavilion," he says. "I also celebrate Mass at two nearby convents of the Sisters of Mercy and hear confessions at various parishes. It's very rewarding to be attentive to people's needs and let them know they are loved."



An original member of Faber community, **BR. DONALD BENGERT** works with the elderly, many of whom are much younger than he is. For 19 years as a volunteer at Mercy St. John's Social Service Center, he has assisted aged and infirm shut-ins by cleaning their homes, driving them to the bank and grocery store, filling out government aid forms, and providing them with companionship. As an ombudsman for Pro Seniors, a non-profit organization that helps and protects the rights of older adults, he visits several nursing homes to make sure residents are being treated well and to bring them Communion. "As a novice in the 50s I was assigned to the infirmary at Milford and eventually became a licensed nurse," says Br. Bengert. "I worked in student health care at Xavier University from 1968 to 1983, which was great, but I wanted to work with the poor, which I've done ever since." In this photograph, Br. Bengert tests the blood sugar level of a 67-year-old man who still lives on his own despite suffering from Alzheimer's disease. "As a Jesuit, I have a commitment to serving the poor," says the Indiana native. "At the end of the day, I hope I'm doing the Lord's work just by trying my best to help."



Enjoying a meal together are (foreground, left to right) **FR. JOHN FERONE, BR. DON BENGERT,** and **BR. JACK MARTIN,** and (far table, left to right) **FR. CHUCK HOFMANN** and **FR. BOB HAGEE.**

Because they work in so many different ministries and are on so many different time schedules, the members of the community are rarely all at home together at the same time. The community has made a serious effort to gather at least every Wednesday to celebrate Eucharist and to eat dinner together. "This meal is our weekly feast," says Fr. John Ferone, "and I've asked the cook on this night to pull out all the stops. I believe it is one simple way of thanking the Jesuits here for the often thankless work they do every day." The recently renovated dining room is adorned with a replica of Titian's painting "Supper at Emmaus." "As the Emmaus story goes, the disciples' eyes were opened to the resurrected Christ in the breaking of the bread, in the tasting of the meal," says Fr. Ferone. "The painting serves as a reminder that the Eucharist flows into our meals, what we do, and who we are. This is what we are about when we gather for a meal—giving thanks and being the body of Christ."

“Doing the laundry of homeless women and men has given me a deeper connection to Jesus and St. Ignatius’s concept of solidarity with the poor.”

—Fr. Peter Sharkey, SJ



For the past 20 years, **BR. JACK MARTIN** has ministered to the homeless in his hometown of Cincinnati. After graduating from St. Xavier High School in 1955, he joined the Jesuits and in 1967 returned to his alma mater. A self-described “jack of all trades, master of none,” Br. Martin spent 19 years at St. X doing everything from working in the assistant principal’s office to driving a school bus before becoming a volunteer at Old St. Mary Catholic Church in Over-the-Rhine. At the time a parishioner, Mrs. Mary Heller (now deceased), had begun an outreach program to the homeless and eventually, with the help of Mr. and Mrs. James Gardner, bought two connected storefront buildings and opened Mary Magdalen House in 1988. “We are a personal care facility that offers the poor and homeless a pleasant and safe place to use the bathroom, shower, have their clothes laundered or replaced, make phone calls, receive mail, and obtain assistance in locating suitable shelters and other social service assistance,” explains Br. Martin, who is an original member of the Faber community and has been instrumental in running Mary Magdalen House from the beginning. “We serve more than 100 male and female guests each day, ranging in age from teenagers to the elderly,” he says. “The goal is to help them regain a sense of personal dignity so they can get on the right track.” Br. Martin (with glasses) is pictured here with volunteer Ted Wenstrup as they wash and fold the laundry of their guests.

FR. PETER SHARKEY joined the Faber community in 2000 and began serving with Br. Jack Martin at Mary Magdalen House. “Doing the laundry of homeless women and men has given me a deeper connection to Jesus and St. Ignatius’s concept of solidarity with the poor,” says the Chicago native, who entered the Jesuits after graduating from St. Ignatius College Prep in 1958. Since his ordination in 1974, Fr. Sharkey has taught high school Latin and debate, as well as run the cafeteria and alumni office at Ignatius, worked in campus ministry at Murray State University in Kentucky and Marian College in Wisconsin, and pursued doctoral studies in church architecture. “Today I love being part of a community that continues to find ways to serve the church and the people of God as we get older,” he says. “My other favorite ministry is being the ‘unofficial, volunteer, part-time chaplain’ at Carriage Court Assisted Living Facility. No matter what religious background they are, I usually get the call when one of the residents is sick or dying since I am the only clergy most of them know. It’s a real privilege.” Fr. Sharkey is pictured here with Dorothea Dudley folding laundry at Mary Magdalen House.

“God has surprised me many times throughout my priesthood.”

— Fr. Donald Nastold, SJ



Cincinnati native, **FR. DONALD NASTOLD**, knew he wanted to be a Jesuit priest and teacher from an early age. “I was very attracted to the Society of Jesus,” he says, “especially the North American martyrs such as Isaac Jogues and John de Brebeuf, and the Jesuit educational system.” He entered the Society in August 1945 at Milford and has served as a teacher or administrator at several Jesuit schools, including Loyola Academy (1952–54), St. Ignatius College Prep (1960–68), St. Xavier High School (1969–75), and Weston Jesuit School of Theology (1975–78), where he helped found and directed for two years the Center for Continuing Education. “God has surprised me many times throughout my priesthood,” says Fr. Nastold, whose career has gone well beyond the classroom as a principal and director, assistant to the provincial for secondary education and pastoral ministry, campus minister at Xavier University, pastor of St. Robert Bellarmine Chapel, and most recently associate pastor of St. Xavier Church in downtown Cincinnati. “But one of the biggest surprises was working as a prison chaplain.” Fr. Nastold joined the Faber community in 2002 and, until recently when he had to step back to battle cancer, has ministered to inmates at the county jail; served as chaplain at St. Ursula Villa, a Catholic grade school; said weekly Mass for retired Sisters of Mercy; and worked as a teacher’s aide at Douglass Public School in Walnut Hills. “Today I spend a lot of time praying for the men of my community and for vocations,” he says. “I’ve learned to trust God and to be hopeful. We talk a lot about faith and love, but we don’t talk enough about being ‘hoppers,’ which is what God calls us to be.”



“When I was trained as a Jesuit, we were taught to go out into the world, to help people in need,” says **BR. ROBERT SCHNEIDER**, a Cincinnati native who attended Elder High School and Xavier University. In 2003, he moved back to his hometown and joined the Faber community after working in Clarkston, Michigan, as a nurse’s aide at Colombiere Center and before that in Chicago as a bookkeeper at Holy Family Church and minister at Arrupe House, Loyola Academy, and St. Ignatius College Prep. “Today I work behind the scenes sorting donations at a food pantry,” says Br. Schneider, who volunteers at the House of Mercy Environment (H.O.M.E.), a non-profit organization sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy that serves the elderly poor and people with special needs with money management, health care and medical assistance, improved housing, and in-home counseling. “This work has made me more aware of the plight of the poor and helped me understand the gospels better. People need food, and we do all we can to make sure our guests are fed.”



As a part-time volunteer at the Center for Chemical Addictions Treatment in Cincinnati, **FR. PETER CAREY** journeys with addicts on the road to recovery. For more than 40 years, the privately-held, residential program has served up to 60 patients at a time who have voluntarily committed to getting clean and sober. “When I joined the Faber community in November 2004, I had virtually no experience in counseling addicts except that I’ve been a recovering alcoholic for 23 years,” says Fr. Carey, who attended Xavier University before entering the Jesuits in 1953. “I’ve spent most of my Jesuit life working as an administrator in academia, and I have to say that as tough as this work can be, I really love it.” What Fr. Carey loves most is giving people the gift of hope: “I often tell our clients, ‘You did not ask to be an addict or an alcoholic, but you can get clean and live a better life.’” The key to recovery, he says, “is a strong spirituality that reminds you again and again of your worth as a human being.”

While most clients are unaware that Fr. Carey is a priest, his Jesuit training and identity shapes everything he does. “I try my best to trust God and to see God at work in everybody, regardless of background or life circumstance,” he says. “My ministry is to be a companion with those experiencing the pain and despair that comes with addiction, to go in through their door, and to lead them out the door that leads to hope and a healthy life.” More than 85% of those who go through the program the first time return to drugs and alcohol and have to repeat the program at least once, and many never succeed in getting clean. “But,” says Fr. Carey, “once someone checks into the program and gets the crap out of their system, they get a taste of hope that may someday lead to recovery. That’s what I try to give them, that experience of hope.”



As part of his work as assistant vocation director for the Chicago Province, **FR. JOHN FERONE** is very active in campus ministry at Miami University in nearby Oxford, Ohio. Each week he moderates an evening prayer group and regularly presides at the student liturgies at St. Mary’s Church on campus (top). Above, he meets with some of the dynamic student leaders who help coordinate the Catholic campus ministry program at Miami University (from left): Joel Sackenheim, Angela Spontelli, Kristen Lucia, and Brad Inkrott.

“The young men and women of this generation are capable of awe and wonder, gratitude and forgiveness,” explains Fr. John. “Like all people, they need friendship and to feel like they belong, so I try to teach them that their life experiences of things like love, forgiveness, joy, pain, and healing are all part of the Catholic tradition, which celebrates life.” Fr. Ferone is always glad when he sees or hears about students going to Mass, but his primary question to them is “So what? Does anybody know they are loved or forgiven because you went to church? Does anybody experience joy or thanksgiving because you celebrated the Eucharist?” No matter which hat he wears—superior, vocation director, celebrant—Fr. Ferone’s message is consistent: “If you believe in God, you are called to experience and share love.”