



IAAS Walks of Life 2005
Rev. James O'Donnell

Rev. James P. O'Donnell highly respects his parents' Irish heritage. Both came from County Mayo. His father, from Islandeady, was a construction worker and his mother, from Ballintubber, was a nanny and cook.

Ordained a priest in 1956, Fr. Jim's first assignments were at Cleveland's St. Colman and Avon's St. Mary parishes then, from 1968 until 1975, he was diocesan CYO director. Next came a year-long, cross-country journey that took him with a group to a spiritual life in cities, mountains, the desert and by the sea, including six weeks of solitude in a monastery, six weeks in a Kansas City flophouse, and time in the fields with migrant workers.

Fr. Jim's personal spiritual journey also included six weeks in 1974 working in India with Mother Teresa and an earlier time with world-renowned Jean Vanier, which led him to be key to establishing in Cleveland, in 1975, the first of the now four L'Arche homes. These, he describes as "communities of love" with core members having disabilities.

In 1980, he and Sister Maggie Walsh-Conrad, one of the cross-country pilgrimage group, formed the Little Brothers and Sisters of the Eucharist to provide a "ministry of presence" in Cleveland's inner city. It's not about clothing or food, Fr. Jim says, "We try to be totally present and live the reality." They worked with Habitat for Humanity in the construction of 30 new homes about 15 years ago and now there are some 600 new homes in the Central area. Officially licensed, Sister Maggie cares for two adopted and 10 foster children. Fr. Jim's prison ministry is to the Juvenile Detention Home and the Northeast Pre-Release Center for women.

It was in 1980, as well, that Fr. Jim helped form the Jesus Caritas Fraternity of priests and, subsequently, the Jesus Caritas Fraternity for lay people. And reflecting both his Irish and inner-city ties is another longtime connection: for 32 years he has been regularly celebrating Mass in St. Malachi Church.

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