

# Ignatian volunteers find community in serving the poor

By Elaine Ireland

## *Special to the Review*

For the past three years, on any given Monday and Thursday, you'll find retired federal government employee Mark Wong assisting the working poor and homeless to obtain clothes, food and financial assistance at the Franciscan Center in Baltimore.

"I'm always in awe of the joy and love I feel from the people we serve," said Wong, a member of Baltimore's Ignatian Volunteer Corps (IVC). "Every day at the Franciscan Center is an uplifting experience. I come away feeling closer to God."

Founded in Baltimore in 1995, IVC now has 17 branches and 465 volunteers in metropolitan areas nationwide. IVC sets up partnerships with local non-profits to provide mature, committed volunteers at a fraction of the cost of a paid employee. The Federal Agency for Service and Volunteering estimates in 2012 alone, Ignatian Volunteers saved the 18 non-profit partners in Baltimore more than \$315,000 in total personnel costs.

Some Baltimore IVC volunteers use their career expertise to help the organization, providing financial advice for The Maryland Society for the Blind or handyman services for The Sisters Academy. Others work directly with individuals in need - teaching at the Esperanza Center, welcoming visitors to Mission Helpers, or ministering to merchant marines through the Apostleship of the Sea.

IVC volunteers serve one or two full days a week, September through May, with a particular organizational partner. Volunteers get to know the people they serve and serve with, and many return to the same placement year after year, choosing also to volunteer year-round.

"IVC has long-standing relationships with a variety of non-profit partners, each committed to giving our volunteers a meaningful experience," said Steve Eberle, IVC Baltimore's regional director. "There's lots of flexibility to work with volunteers' schedules and service aspirations to find a placement that meets everyone's needs." Volunteers cherish the spiritual component of IVC, gathering monthly for a morning of fellowship and sharing. There are also retreat opportunities for volunteers and access to a spiritual guide for individual reflection. These gatherings provide a diverse, yet supportive community for people easing into retirement or new to the area, or for those just eager to give of themselves to others.

At the very heart of IVC's mission is a commitment to social justice and creating community for the betterment of volunteers and those they serve. Using their experience to bring about change, IVC volunteers, in return, experience the joy that making a difference brings to their lives and the lives of others.

*For more information on the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, call 410-752-4686.*

*Elaine Ireland, MA, a parishioner at the Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City, is a Christian writer and leads retreats on pastoral parenting and finding the Spirit in everyday life.*

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