

Outreach fueled by faith



Faces of Faith

Several years after Brian Gracie began raising funds to support the Franciscan Center's emergency assistance programs for impoverished people in Baltimore, a member of his own family found himself in need of those very services.

The family member had been a highly successful attorney and accountant whose life unraveled as a result of mental illness and the abuse of drugs and alcohol. The Franciscan Center provided much-needed meals and other support.

"You have people from all walks of life falling down and needing help," said Gracie, a 50-year-old parishioner of the Catholic Community of St. Francis Xavier in Hunt Valley. "What I like about the Franciscan Center is that it not only helps the poor and needy, but it tries to make a transformation in their lives."

Gracie, founder and partner at Heritage Financial Consultants in Hunt Valley and a registered representative of Lincoln Financial Advisors, was honored this fall as the Franciscan Center's 2017 recipient of the Spirit of St. Francis Award. The recognition is given to an individual who upholds and demonstrates the center's ideals.

Gracie, a founding member of the Franciscan Center's Circle of St. Francis, said he admires the breadth of the charity's ministry.

"It's not just the lunch and dinner programs," he said. "They are teaching them skills, helping with resumes and getting them in a position of being able to go out to get that interview and get that job."

Gracie highlighted the Franciscan Center's "Attire 4 Hire" program that provides business clothing for those searching for employment. The center has other offerings, including a children's library, counseling services, mail service, health screenings and more.

In addition to supporting the Franciscan Center, the graduate of James Madison University in Virginia is involved in similar development efforts with Catholic Charities of Baltimore. He is also active on the board of directors of the Baltimore branch of The First Tee, a program that builds character and teaches young people respect through golf. The program has introduced golf to children in inner-city Baltimore neighborhoods.

GET TO KNOW

Brian Gracie

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What is your parish?

*Catholic Community of St. Francis Xavier,
Hunt Valley*

Who had the most influence over the development of your faith?

*"I've had wonderful mentors - my parents
and then several other mentors who are 20
to 25 years older than me who have taken
an interest in my life. I hope to do that for
other people down the road going the other
way."*

Gracie's outreach is fueled in large measure by his Catholic faith.

"When I read the Bible, I see that Jesus talks all the time about helping people in need," said Gracie, who grew up in St. Joseph Parish in Cockeysville.

A father of two grown children who has been married to his wife, Gina, for 26 years, Gracie said he did not become fully engaged in his faith until his late 20s. That's when he started attending a nondenominational men's Bible study every week. Begun by one of his business partners, the Bible study was conducted by three chaplains for the PGA Golf Tour.

"It was very non-threatening," said Gracie, who still faithfully attends the Bible

studies. “I’ve always believed in God. This makes you more accountable and it connected all the dots.”

Gracie is encouraged by Pope Francis’ frequent calls for a greater awareness about the needs of the poor and vulnerable. He hopes more people will become aware of the outreach provided by the Franciscan Center.

“It’s a bit of a hidden secret in Baltimore,” he said, “but, if you’re a person in need, you know all about how serious they are at the Franciscan Center about providing help.”

Meg Ducey, director of development and marketing for the Franciscan Center, said it was fitting to honor Gracie as the center begins its 50th year.

“His wisdom and leadership in our Circle of St. Francis has helped guide the Franciscan Center’s growth,” she said. “He exemplifies the spirit of our patron, St. Francis of Assisi, who said, ‘Preach the Gospel at all times, and, when necessary, use words.’”

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