

The Boston College **Chronicle**

November 15, 2007 - vol. 16 no. 6

‘House of Inquiry’ Opens

Manresa House to serve as center for vocational discernment

By Jack Dunn Director of Public Affairs

Since the establishment of the first Jesuit universities, a major tenet of Ignatian spirituality has been for students to ask, “What does God want me to do?”

For those students exploring a vocation in ordained ministry and religious life, the opening of Manresa House, the first center for vocational discernment at Boston College, will help to assist in that exploration.

Opened Nov. 1 in a University-owned property on 24 Mayflower Road, Manresa House will offer information and programming on vocational ministry and serve as a meeting place for students who are contemplating religious service. Sponsored jointly by the Office of Campus Ministry at Boston College and the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, the “house of inquiry,” as it is called, will be directed by Jack Butler, SJ, a BC campus minister and director of vocations for the New England Province.

Manresa House, which contains common meeting areas, four bedrooms, a prayer room, a kitchen and a TV room, will host student candidates for the Society of Jesus for stays ranging from a weekend to several weeks, during which they will meet with Fr. Butler to discuss their calling. They will also be assigned a Jesuit companion who will meet them for dinner and offer formational guidance. Manresa House will also afford BC students the opportunity to interact with vocation directors from other religious orders and dioceses throughout New England who will be invited to talk about the unique attributes of their ministry.

“The Church in general and the Society of Jesus in particular have increased our sensitivity toward the need for vocational promotion,” said Campus Ministry Director James Erps, SJ. “Our office has always been involved in helping students to reflect on what they will do with their lives. This house, and the work of Fr. Jack Butler, will specify this important option.”

Manresa House is an extension of an outreach effort begun by University President William P. Leahy, SJ, who started a priesthood discussion group in 1998 for BC students who were considering a vocation. His group, which meets monthly in his office, engages students in frank discussions of priestly life and the joys and challenges that such a calling holds. Since its founding nine years ago, approximately a dozen of the group’s participants have gone into the priesthood. It was in response to the success of the discussion group that Fr. Leahy decided to establish Manresa House this year.

At its opening, several dozen BC students joined Fr. Butler, Jesuit Provincial Thomas Regan, SJ, and a representation of vocation directors ranging from the Archdiocese of Boston to the Legionnaires of Christ in celebrating a resource that holds such great promise for all involved.

“I have thought about a vocation in the past,” said BC senior Timothy Moriarty, a philosophy major from Seattle, “and I know there are a lot of people at BC who have thought about it

who may not be comfortable talking about it with their peers. This provides a place to explore what God may be calling us to do, a place to discern. It will be a very good resource for BC students.”

Added senior Thomas Hofmann, a philosophy and English major from Sausalito, Calif., who is considering the priesthood, “The commitment to Manresa House shows that the BC administration is taking an active step toward addressing a growing need on campus. There are many students asking questions about vocations who haven’t really decided what they want to do. This house gives us a place to talk with others who are considering the same possibilities.”

Hofmann was particularly impressed by the number of vocation directors who were present at the opening. “Their presence gave me a picture of the Church that everyone considering a vocation should have. Seeing all these people and having conversations on Ignatian spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, is wonderful and will help me to decide where I go from here.”

Sister Lisa Buscher, RSCJ, who does outreach ministry for the Religious of the Sacred Heart, praised the establishment of Manresa House and the benefit it holds for those hoping to attract Catholic students to religious life. “I think it is a great idea for bringing people in the Church who want to talk about their vocations and service to God,” said Sister Buscher, who lives in community with seven sisters on Beacon Street in Newton. “It is an asset and a resource for all of us, and we hope to tie into this place as much as we can.”

Students, vocation directors and colleagues alike offered universal praise for Fr. Butler, whose blend of enthusiasm and charisma make him an ideal person to lead this important effort.

“Fr. Jack is an absolutely wonderful priest whose energy is contagious,” said Moriarty. “What really impresses me is that he looks at each person to see how God is working in their lives. He wants to bring people to Christ, wherever they are. That is what attracts people to him”

Added Kathleen Spellman of BC Campus Ministry, “I can’t think of anyone better for this job than Jack Butler. He really connects with students in a way the rest of us can only strive for. He is truly gifted and his efforts will really help students and the Church.”