



# JESUIT VOLUNTEER CORPS YEARS



Alaska missionary Tom Gallagher, SJ, met with Rita Behm, Anna Birmingham, Cecilia Stone, and Ruth Anderson, volunteers at St. Mary's Mission in Alaska, in 1966. The work that volunteers had been doing there since 1956 became the basis for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

## THEY CAME.

They were recent college graduates from Gonzaga University in Spokane and Regis College in Weston, Massachusetts, who knew little about what was in front of them but had a sense of adventure and wanted to serve. Their skills and talents were needed to teach at a mission school in Copper Valley, Alaska, in 1956, and they responded with enthusiasm and faith. The journey was not easy, but it made a difference to the people of Copper Valley, to the Jesuits and sisters who were able to staff a school, and to the volunteers themselves.

The volunteers, part of a loose organization with no official name, also started staffing a boarding school run by Jesuits and Ursuline Sisters at St. Mary's (above). Jack Morris, SJ, teaching in Alaska, saw great potential here. He became the first director of the Alaska volunteer program in 1964 and began to give more structure and attention to the program.

Now, 50 years later, recent college graduates are still coming to serve as Jesuit Volunteers (JVs), bringing with them a desire to work with and serve those in our society who have been marginalized. They use their skills and talents to assist Jesuit ministries and other nonprofit organizations that work in housing, community organizing, education, economic

development, legal service, refugee and immigration services, and many other areas.

In 2005, over 300 JVs began their service in 54 places in the United States and eight other countries. They come from 39 states and 129 colleges and universities (over 50 percent from Jesuit institutions).

The four values of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and Jesuit Volunteers International—spirituality, social justice, community, and simple living—have grown in a more formalized way as JVC has grown and matured to the program it is today. It now includes more integration of formal Ignatian spirituality practices, opportunities for exploration of larger social justice issues, and the challenge of simple living in a more technologically complex world.

It is these values that the almost 12,000 former Jesuit Volunteers continue to live out as employers, employees, spouses, parents, friends, and citizens.

In celebration of our 50th year, we invite *Company's* readers to take a virtual "tour" of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in these next few pages.

—Maggie Conley, Project Director  
Jesuit Volunteer Corps National Activities

## JVC NORTHWEST

I spent a morning recently with Tom Gallagher, SJ, who I had first seen as a scholastic in a short 1956 film produced by Alaska Airlines, *Operation Snowbird*, documenting the airlift of children and staff from Holy Cross Mission in Alaska to a new school in Copper Valley. Tom, who spent 50 years in ministry in Alaska, shared stories of students and volunteers at Copper Valley, detailing the joys, challenges, and heartbreak. This was the beginning of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps!

My experience as a JV myself and as staff is that the history of the JVC is tied up with a passion for justice we learn from those who are on the edges of our society. It settles deep in our bones and changes how we perceive reality and what we choose to do in life. That crazy phrase, “ruined for life,” is about not being able to go back to life as we knew it before JVC and about being impelled to work for the common good. We have learned what that means from folks who live on the underside and from our fellow JVs in community who challenge and support us every day.

We look forward to 50 more years of the adventure of working for a more just and compassionate world!

—Jeanne Haster, Executive Director



Jeanette Meleen was a JV who served as a houseparent at St. Labre Catholic School in Ashland, Montana, in 2004.

## JVC MIDWEST

Founded in Cleveland in 1974, JVC Midwest works in collaboration with the Detroit, Chicago, Missouri, and Wisconsin Jesuit provinces. We moved to Detroit in 1980, and in a few years, communities began in a number of locales, including Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Des Moines. Currently, there are JVC Midwest communities in Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Pontiac, Michigan. Counting from day one, over 900 volunteers have been a part of our mission.

One program we’ve recently added is called the Ignatian Year, exclusively for volunteers who have completed one or more years of service and who want to experience the Spiritual Exercises in everyday life, meeting with a spiritual director for the year.

And another new development is the Magis program, which offers a critical next step in spiritual, academic, and career development. In partnership with Loyola University Chicago, JVC Magis volunteers work on a tuition-free master’s degree while serving people in a variety of Chicago’s many nonprofit agencies.

—Gerry Brisson, Executive Director



Zac Wermer, Tracey Osterlund, Kristen Iagulli, Greg Baker, and Jen Baker, the Kansas City JVC Midwest community in 2002, got to the *Field of Dreams* site in Dyersville, Iowa, after a retreat.

# JESUIT VOLUNTEERS International

Jesuit Volunteers International began in 1984 with ten volunteers in Belize; the program now serves eight countries, including Tanzania, Micronesia, and Peru, and plans to expand in Africa.

We're also in Nepal, a country I visited last January to meet with our Jesuit Volunteers at St. Xavier's Godavari School outside Kathmandu. St. Xavier's reminded me a lot of JVC's beginnings in rural Alaska: Jesuits, Jesuit Volunteers, sisters, and lay colleagues working to empower youth through education.

While visiting volunteers at St. Mary's, Alaska, years ago, as director of JVC Northwest, I was weathered in for five extra days. But when a native woman invited me to learn beading, what I thought were going to be wasted days became one of the richest experiences of my life.

In Nepal this January we had to "wait" through a tense day of a general strike in the country called by Maoist rebels opposing the rule of the king. Schools and businesses were closed. Once again, our schedule was changed and I experienced another type of richness from the local people attending a novena held by Jesuits there to pray for peace.

—Mary Medved SNJM, Executive Director



Chris Keeney, a current JV, is a high school teacher in Majuro in the Marshall Islands.



JVC East was serving many inner-city locations on the East Coast, including Newark, New Jersey, by the time of this '79 photo.

## JVC EAST

JVC East, the first extension of the JVC program that started in the Northwest, began with 23 JVs in 1975. Wherever JVs are, there is the same spirit of generosity, the same struggle to live simply, build community, work with the poor, and grow spiritually. More than 2,000 men and women have served from Raleigh, North Carolina, to Portland, Maine, in cities large and small, and their service has saved schools and social service agencies on the East Coast millions and millions of dollars. JVs on the East Coast get involved in advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C., and New York. JVC East prizes its former Jesuit volunteers who are engaged in social justice efforts around the world—including Bob Casey, Jr., '82, who is running for the U.S. Senate, Nancy Small, '85, who served as national director of Pax Christi, scores of teachers at all levels, social workers, and 16 former volunteers who are now Jesuits!

—Kate Haser, Executive Director



Volunteer Joe Palus worked at a shelter for homeless men in New Orleans from 1989 to 1990.

## JVC SOUTHWEST

JVC Southwest started in 1977 serving the Navajo Nation in Arizona (the largest Indian reservation in the United States), in Oakland's inner city, and in California's agricultural Central Valley. Doubling to 40 volunteers in 1978 and later reaching a peak of 112, our region has emphasized social justice issues throughout its history, from assisting Central American refugees seeking sanctuary to protesting nuclear proliferation.

Currently, 64 volunteers live in 12 communities in Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and Phoenix and take part in retreats based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. JVC Southwest understands the need for volunteers on the border of Mexico and will open an Arizona/Mexico border community in 2006.

Since 1977, 2,288 volunteers have served in the Southwest. Many, such as Kate Chatfield and Peter Stiehler, founders of the Catholic Worker in San Bruno, California, continue to live JVC's values.

—Jennifer Arenz, Alumni Coordinator

## JVC SOUTH

Joe is one of 1,100 of our JV alumni who have volunteered in more than 200 nonprofit agencies and have come to understand the diversity of cultures, the people who gave birth to the Civil Rights Movement, and the growing Latino population, all in the "new" South we serve. They addressed the rapid rise in the number of people with HIV/AIDS in the 1990s and helped resettle waves of refugees from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and now Africa.

In 1980, nineteen Jesuit Volunteers came to the first orientation in South Texas right as Hurricane Allen hit! Later volunteers had a cross burned on the front lawn of their house by the KKK in Mississippi. And it was in 2000 that the JVC community house in San Antonio was destroyed in a fire. Homeless and shaken but unharmed and undeterred, the six JVs stayed to serve the city and learned the humility it takes to receive assistance from others.

The 25 to 45 yearly volunteers in our area work in Houston, San Antonio, the Rio Grande Valley, Nashville, Mobile, Birmingham, and Atlanta, and we plan to start a community in El Paso and again in New Orleans to help rebuild the city that Joe served years ago.

—Pam Krinock, Executive Director



This year's JVC Southwest crew, right off planes and buses, celebrate liturgy on the beach near Aptos, California, during orientation last August.

[www.jesuitvolunteers.org](http://www.jesuitvolunteers.org)