

# Getting There

By George McCauley, S.J.

Ciszek Hall in the Bronx houses a glorious group of young Jesuits. Most of them are pursuing a Masters in Philosophical Resources at Fordham University. It's a three year program, because they also take theology courses along the way. Apart from two homegrown New Yorkers and one scholastic from the Puerto Rico Region, they're from almost every province in the States. For many the Belmont section they live in just off the Fordham campus is, as they say, a new experience. Though advertised as Little Italy North (the bocchi crowd regularly commandeers part of the small neighborhood park), there are more than many Albanians, Hispanics and African-Americans as well, with occasional well fortified housing complexes for Fordham undergrads who prefer an off campus alternative. Right down the street from Ciszek is a modest mosque; a little farther on is beautiful Mount Carmel Church, anchor of many neighborhood activities, especially the San Gennaro and St. Anthony festivals. All this can be a bit overwhelming, especially if you add Manhattan to the mix. One scholastic says: "New York City is too vertical; I prefer horizontal." That's an improvement over: "The Bronx, ugh!" Another adds a more measured perspective: "It would be very unwise not to have scholastics here."

While scholastics might grouse about their studies at times, most are grateful for this in-depth exposure to the big philosophical issues and to the sinuous history of Christian thought, with all the critical reflection that gives rise to. It almost reminds you, *mutatis mutandis!*, of a scene from *The Brothers Karamazov*: "What do young Russians do — some of them at any rate? They go into a stinking tavern like this one and sit down in a corner. These young fellows don't know one another and it will be forty years before they meet again. What do they discuss in those brief moments? Only essential questions."

Still, it's not all brooding head trips. Most see the time spent as a fitting way to prepare for priesthood, which for many is a defining goal — far away yet close. They have a sense that the Church needs what they're doing now. For others their studies are an exciting new way of encountering Christ as 'truth' and what that might be all about.

Jesuit formation at this stage also involves experiencing community life. You're living in a fishbowl; you have to clean up after one another; maybe you lost your common sense, maybe you don't share another's ecstatic joy at discovering the early Kierkegaard or the late Kant. You may not even share another's views on where the Society's mission lies at this juncture of history. Asked what he liked best about Ciszek, one enigmatic soul responded, "Living in a house of formation." Asked what he liked least, he gave the same answer! Scholastics can just as easily sing the praises of their community adventure. They'll put it different ways. Some prize the friendship, the faith sharing groups, hanging out together on Thursday evenings, or doing Morning Prayer together. Others groove on the dinner patter, the community retreats at Cornwall, or just being around other zealous Jesuits. All seem grateful for the mentoring and spiritual direction they get from Frs. Tom Feely and Henry Bertels. A highlight of their New York experience is the variety of apostolic experiences they can engage in. Some tutor kids and teach CCD at St. Martin of Tours parish down the road or at our own Jesuit parish in Harlem. A place for pastoral ministry is the nearby St. Barnabas Hospital, where they visit the AIDS and detox wards. Some have worked at POTS, a local multi-faceted facility for

street people and the poor. Others tutor at Theodore Roosevelt High School, a maximum multicultural complex across from the University. Others make the rounds of the Jesuit Province Infirmary adjacent to the University grounds.

Some of their ministry involves the University itself. Joseph Carver works with the Chaplain, helping a cadre of other students organize the *Ignatian Weeks* held each semester at the Rose Hill, Tarrytown and Lincoln Center campuses. Brian Dunkle worked with a vocation discernment group. Some scholastics join the folk choir and are the backbone of the Sunday night student liturgies. Others work with student retreats. Others go to Appalachia on Global Outreach projects. The scholastics are a mystery to some students. “They think we’re neat — cool — but a little weird,” says one. A few are turned off; “possibly because of the recent scandals,” as one scholastic suspects. The scholastics, on the other hand, think the students are bright, enthusiastic and caring. They are grateful for how the students, as one put it, “keep me sane and grounded.” Many report a spiritual thirst on the part of students and have had great spiritual and theological conversations with them.

During summer breaks, a Ciszek scholastic might teach English in Poland, as Joe Riordan did, or get a little taste of the Third World in places like China, Myanmar or East Timor. They aren’t the Bronx, but they’ll do. So will these young Jesuits.