



# Slow Miracles

*"We must speak to them with our hands, before we try to speak to them with our lips."  
Saint Peter Claver, SJ*

## Feinstein \$1 million Challenge

During both March and April of this year the Feinstein Foundation has issued a \$1 million challenge to fight hunger across the nation. We are glad to participate, once again, in this worthy cause, especially in these hard economic times. More are coming to our doors than ever before and this annual challenge has helped us keep pace with the growing need. Our friends help us keep our pantry full to serve those most in need.



### Inside this issue:

- Feinstein Challenge 1
- Irish Blessing 1
- Interventions 2
- El Centro McKenna 2
- Sports Events 3
- Directors Note 4

## Neighbors in Need

The McKenna Center is grateful to all its donors large or small. We are particularly grateful for a \$15,000 grant that we recently received from the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region. The Community Foundation undertook a campaign to raise funds to help organizations like the McKenna Center that directly assist the poor. These funds will help us say "yes" to more people struggling to pay their rent or utility bills as well as helping us cope with the growth in our drop-in center population.

Other recent grants received have come from:

- Saint Mary's of Sorrows Parish, Fairfax, Virginia
- The John E. Fowler Foundation
- Women in Housing and Finance (WHF)

## An Irish Blessing



Boyle School Dancers and the Bog Band

On March 8, the Lower Church at Saint Aloysius was filled with Irish music and dancers as **Pete Moss and the Bog Band** offered a benefit performance for the McKenna Center. This is the second year running for this event. The band was joined by singer Paul Gannon and the **Boyle School Irish Dancers** who gave a Riverdance feel to the entire event. The McKenna Center is grateful to Alice McDermott who helped arrange the performance and her son Patrick, a Gonzaga student who plays in the band. Giovana Bello and the Gonzaga Mothers' Club provided a marvelous spread of food and drinks that was enjoyed by all. The event raised over \$3000 for the McKenna Center at a time when demand for our services is rising.



## Interventions

By Gary Hines

One of the things we continually stress here at the Father McKenna Center is taking the next step. For lack of a better phrase, we have quite a number of “higher functioning” guests. Guys that can do more and just don’t. Over the past few months we as a staff group have been intervening with some of the men, attempting to induce that next step.

Two gentlemen in particular come to mind, Paul and Ted, not their real names. Both of whom have had careers, have gifts and for whatever their reasons have come to the McKenna Center. They stick out; their past lives haven’t been completely dimmed by their present circumstances. At the same time, they are just marking time, one day rolling into the next. They’re stuck.

If anyone has seen the program “Intervention” on A&E, we employ a similar format, a group coming together with a person dealing with a serious drug or alcohol problem and getting them to realize they need to go into treatment and get out of their own way. Though often we can’t get a direct relative to participate with us, in many ways our clients regard us as a quasi-family.

Paul is very clean-cut and affable, on the surface has a lot going for him. Formerly employed in the District govern-

ment, he has abilities. To us it seemed his obstacle was himself. Tom, Virginia, Gary Smith and I sat down with Paul after the drop-in center closed at 1 PM. Our first statement was one of concern, we saw where his life was headed and we were concerned that he turns his life around.

After an hour long meeting, involving a lot of attempting to wiggle out of it, Paul agreed to handle some family matters and go into a long-term facility at the beginning of March. We’ve seen him again, he says he’s getting a job to help with his family, yet none of his issues have been dealt with. We wish him well, but my gut tells me he is setting himself up for another fall.

Ted is also affable but a little more bedraggled. By his own admission it’s because he’s in a depression over his circumstances and he continues to use to numb the pain. He hates the pattern he’s settled into. Again, the four of us sat down with him, he too attempted to wiggle out of it and finally he did state that he needed to be present at three family functions and treatment would prevent him from going. He was adamant. We’ll support him in his decision, over the past few months Ted has come back to life, but he has a tough road to travel.

The one thing that these inventions has shown us, is as a staff we must work in concert with each other. Ultimately, we must use our individual and collective experiences with our guests to cut off all avenues of escape, so that they realize for themselves a better way of life.

## El Centro McKenna

The poverty in the North Capitol Street and H Street corridors has historically been African-American. It used to be rare to have a Latino visit the McKenna Center. After finding that the McKenna Center conducted its affairs in English, the rare Latino man would simply go elsewhere.

At present, the vast majority of those who come to the McKenna Center for services are African-American, but there is a growing number of people who speak only Spanish coming to the McKenna Center. An 11 AM support group meeting conducted in English is of little use to those who do not understand much English.

### Weinberg Foundation Match

**The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation** for the coming year have provided the Father McKenna Center a matching grant challenge opportunity. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated

Recently we began an outreach to our Spanish-speaking brothers by conducting an 11 AM meeting with them as best we can and by networking with service providers in the city. The Spanish Catholic Center on Monroe Street in DC has been particularly helpful.

Poco a poco (little by little) we are learning each other’s language and getting in touch with vital services. Jorge has gotten a job and a place to live. He is a refugee from Columbia and we helped him secure a document that he had lost. Jose got his coat washed and we all know both the English and Spanish words for knife and fork. It’s an adventure.



## Baseball

Tom Boswell of the Washington Post tells us that life begins on opening day. Again this year we would like to take homeless guys to ball-games. We aren't interested in box seats but for \$15 we can buy a guy a ticket and get him to the game and back. Please consider donating while Spring Training is in full swing.

**Did you know** that you can help support the McKenna Center and it's programs even after death? By naming the McKenna Center as a beneficiary in your will, you can leave behind a lasting legacy of helping the poor by providing financial and/or material needs that will support our programs well into the future.

There are a number of ways to help and your estate attorney will be able to help you determine which is best for you. If you would like some examples, please contact Tom Howarth on 202-842-1112 or by e-mail at [tomhowarth@fathermckennacenter.org](mailto:tomhowarth@fathermckennacenter.org).

## Hoops and Pucks

The Father McKenna Center is deeply grateful to Ted Leonsis of the Washington Capitals, Judy Holland of the Washington Wizards and Jim and Liz Larranaga of the George Mason University Patriots for including the homeless in Washington's sports life.

Theodore who is from Romania and a frequent guest in our hypothermia prevention program was so thrilled to see Alex Ovechkin play. He was like a kid in a candy store. The Wizards are having a tough year but sitting downstairs at a game is an unusual experience for homeless guys. We were all amazed at the kindness and concern of Jim Larranaga at George Mason who made sure we got to some games and his wife Liz who made sure we had something to eat.

For those with season tickets, seeing a professional or college game seems like no big deal but for men who could not possibly afford a ticket, it is a mighty big treat.



Playback Theater Group performing for the men

### STAFF

- *Tom Howarth*  
Director
- *Gary Hines*  
Associate Director
- *Ron Rogers*  
Facilities Manager
- *Virginia Jenkins*  
Reception
- *Reginald Green*  
Staff
- *John Mead*  
Dep. Facilities Manager
- *Gary Smith*  
Staff
- *Cathie Conway*  
Controller
- *Mary Ann Wilding, RN*  
In Memoriam
- *Don Mayhew*  
Volunteer
- *Ed Mullan*  
Ignation Volunteer
- *Tyler Przybylek*  
Ignation Volunteer

## The McKenna Center Needs & Wish List

### Men's Clothing

Jeans  
Sleeping Bags  
New Underwear & Socks  
Plastic Rain Gear  
Sneakers & Boots, sizes 10 thru 12  
Caps

### Personal Care Items

Deodorant, Razors, Soap & Shampoo  
Toothpaste & Toothbrushes  
Hair care products  
New Wash Cloths  
New Towels & Sheets  
1 gallon size Zip Lock Bags  
Baby Powder  
Lotion/ Vaseline  
Laundry Detergent

### Kitchen Needs

Pasta & Spaghetti Sauce  
Canned Meats  
Box Cereals & Instant Oatmeal  
Ensure/ Boost for HIV+ clients  
Oven Mitts, Steel Wool & Cleaning Supplies  
Measuring Spoons

### Urgent Kitchen Needs

16 Qt Pots  
12 to 16 in. Frying Pans  
Large Water Dispensing Coolers  
Large Commercial Pots & Pans  
Commercial Ice Machine



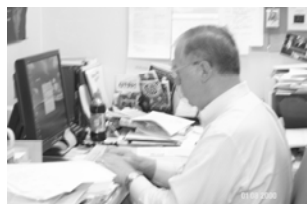
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## Slow Miracles



From the Desk of the  
Director

Last November, I made my 15<sup>th</sup> trip to El Salvador since 1991. One purpose of my trip was to attend the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the University of Central America (the UCA) remembering the six Jesuit priests who were murdered along with their two women co-workers in 1989. The spirit of the university in 2008 was just as impressive as it was for my first visit in 1991 and like all the other years this year's event had a theme. The words on the altar at the vigil mass proclaimed that the Jesuits were "Martyrs because they wanted social inclusion."

Of late, I've been reading a couple of books by Fr. Peter McVerry, S.J. who works with homeless youth in Dublin, Ireland. Fr. McVerry writes a lot about the exclusion of homeless youth from Irish society. He also interprets the Gospels as a story that reveals to us that God wants all his children included in a decent life. Fr. McVerry speaks of "God's passion for compassion."

The poor and homeless that we serve at the McKenna Center are the "excluded" in Washington, DC. They are at the bot-

tom of the social and economic ladder. No tour buses visit their neighborhoods. They are not part of the middle class that the politicians proclaim to have at the top of their list of concerns. They are not homeowners with mortgages that the government is rushing to protect. If they are lucky enough to have a place of their own, they are renters. If their community has caught the eye of developers, they are in danger of displacement.

January 20<sup>th</sup> was a special day for our country and for our African-American brothers and sisters with the inauguration of our nation's first African-American president. The homeless men who come to our drop-in center were as excited as anyone. They wanted to be part of this historic occasion.

A week before Inauguration Day, I received a phone call from the press asking me if the McKenna Center would be open on January 20 or would we avoid the predicted transportation mess and stay home? I saw no reason to be closed. Then a few days before the big day, I was told that the homeless shelters would stay open that day and lunch would be served. If a homeless person had a lot of stuff that they carried

## About the Father McKenna Center:

The Father McKenna Center was established in 1983 to carry on the legacy of Fr. Horace McKenna, the saintly Jesuit priest who served at St. Aloysius parish from 1962 until his death in 1982 and maintained a heroic apostolate to the poor of inner city Washington. The Center today continues to meet his concern for the homeless and poor of our part of this city, the North Capitol street area of downtown Washington, by some accounts the poorest area of town.

The Center serves the area by operating a daytime drop-in Center for homeless men, one of two such facilities in downtown Washington. We offer our guests assistance with showers, laundry, telephone and local transportation, as well as referrals for a wide array of basic services to meet medical, employment and other personal needs. We assist over 100 men a day with these programs. Our Transitional Shelter program will assist a dozen men each year in learning to regain life and work skills. In addition, we respond to hypothermia alerts each winter by offering overnight relief from the cold to up to 25 men, who are otherwise extremely vulnerable to winter weather. Our outreach to households in our community includes provision of rent and utility assistance to scores of households each year, as well as the emergency food program, which assists two hundred fifty families annually, by providing a food bag each month.

around, special provision would be made to store it. And finally, I was told that there would be no transportation from the shelters to the downtown area on January 20.

Now on a normal cold winter's day in Washington, DC, the shelters remain open but lunch is not served. On those days, homeless men are encouraged to leave the shelters and seek food at places like the McKenna Center. If you are lucky enough to get a spot on the bus provided by the city, you can catch a ride downtown. No storage is provided for people who carry their worldly belongings around town.

Well, Inauguration Day was no ordinary day. People came from far and wide to be in DC. Yet, it seemed that the homeless were being induced to stay out of town in those shelters on the far fringes of the city. The homeless could get the impression that this vast celebration did not involve them. They were being encouraged to exclude themselves.

Three hundred homeless men used to reside at the Franklin Shelter at 13<sup>th</sup> and K Streets NW. Two hundred of them were moved from that downtown shelter to the 801 shelter on the

grounds of Saint Elizabeth's in Southeast. The city said that they intended to house some of those at Franklin in their own apartments as part of the Permanent Supportive Housing initiative and move the rest to other shelters. That is exactly what they did without one bit of concern about what the displacement of people from downtown would do to those people. Shortly, after the closing of Franklin, the city suspended the Permanent Supportive Housing Initiative.

The homeless men we see at the McKenna Center are in a hole. The hole was not dug by them alone. We hear so many stories of absent fathers, poor schooling, foster care and abuse. Many of our guests are people who never had a chance and then added to their woes by self-medicating their pain. But, can we blame someone for being born?

When we push those who are already in a hole deeper into the hole by excluding them and telling them to live where no one wants to go, we make the likelihood of their getting out of the hole more remote. And, then we can blame them for living down to our expectations.