

Jesuit Retreat Center

October 2024

Centennial Newsletter Series

1935 – 1945

Growth, Leaders, & the Half-Dollar Club

By Pat Clough

"If you build it, they will come;" the theme of a much-loved movie, A Field of Dreams (1989).

St. Ignatius of Loyola might have said this when he sent his Jesuit priests out to their missions in 1545. Pope Pius XI had this in mind when he directed priests in the late 1800's to establish retreats for the laity in their provinces. And it was Father Dominic Giacobbi at the Jesuit Novitiate in Los Gatos, California, who seized an opportunity in 1899 when he directed Father Richard Gleeson to give the *Spiritual Exercises* to two recent graduates returning home from Georgetown University. "If you build it;" yes. Retreats for laymen had begun.



Overview (in case you missed the *Early Years* newsletter): The vision for retreats began to take shape with the formation of the Laymen's Retreat Association in 1903 which grew in numbers from the 1899 encounter with Father Gleeson and led to the purchase of the Wellman Estate in 1924 by the Jesuit Western Province. Growth accelerated in the first decade of the newly named El Retiro San Iñigo. The existing buildings were adapted for retreatants and a temporary chapel was designed out of a billiard room. By 1935, rapid growth was inevitable. Even with the construction of Loyola Hall, Rossi Chapel, and the addition of twelve more acres of land, the need for more retreat space drove expansion.



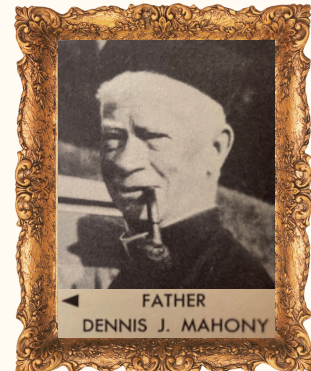
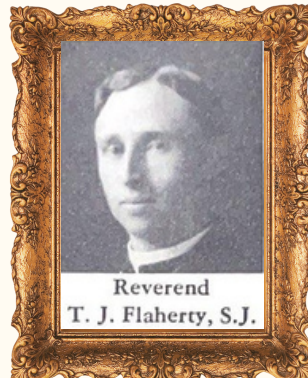
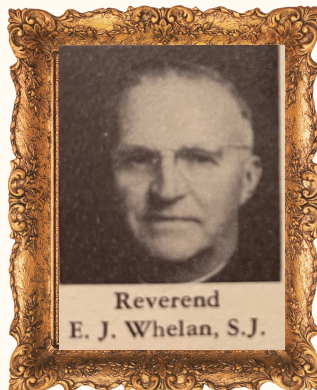
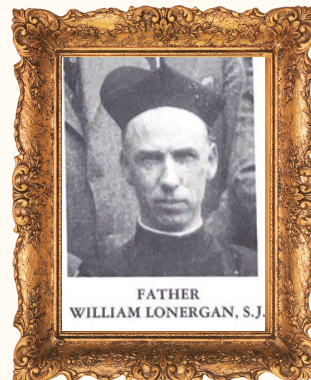
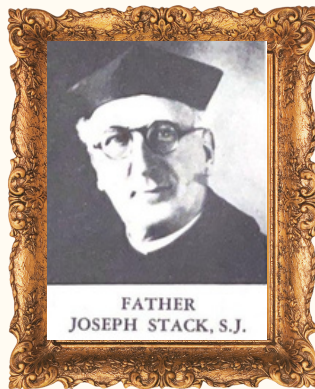
Western Jesuit Bulletin 1935

"Since 1925, over 7,043 laymen have made retreats at El Retiro. They came wondering in their minds; and left knowing in their hearts. There is scarcely a weekend now that goes retreatless.

Any man who has made a three-day retreat at El Retiro San Iñigo will tell you the same story. It is a spiritual odyssey that leads through the uncharted seas of man's own soul, with its hidden shoals of unforgiven sins and storms of treacherous passions, into the broad, calm bay of self-knowledge and peace."

The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola remained the foundation of every retreat. Laymen became pilgrims, the very name Ignatius gave himself six hundred years earlier.

Leaders
The Padres of El Retiro



“Yet more than retreat masters, the Padres of El Retiro have found their way into the hearts of the Men of El Retiro.” Fathers Edwin A. McFadden and William M. Boland are remembered as “sympathetic, scholarly men of Christ with a deep understanding of the human soul and its longings and ambitions.” They were joined during the first two decades by Fathers Dominic Giacobbi, Denis Mahony, “Joe” Sullivan, Thomas Flaherty, James Hayes, and William Lonergan. Their sacred work followed the footsteps of Fathers Joseph Stack, Zacheus Maher, Edward Whelan, Joseph Crowley, Eugene Ivancovich, Harold Ring, William Butler, and William Rice. We pause this narrative to highlight a few of these remarkable men. Some are the subjects of legends.

Extraordinary Leaders

“They who teach others unto salvation, shall shine as the stars of heaven. This is a prophecy given to encourage the hearts of priests.”

On the occasion, of his 50th Jubilee in August of 1939, Father William Boland, S.J., received a gift from “thousands of his friends who gave of their own treasures to make a ‘shining star’ in his honor.” Used to display the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, a monstrance is the name given to the vessel that holds the Blessed Sacrament in a delicate casing. Most often in the shape of a sunburst, this ‘shining star’ was created from diamonds, amethysts, gold and platinum; every ounce and every jewel coming from old bracelets, rings, watches, brooches, and heirlooms of grateful retreatants. It took four months for two expert craftsmen to complete.



Father Joseph Stack, S.J., founder and first Superior of El Retiro, served from 1925-1931. He returned to El Retiro in 1943 to join the retreat house staff at the request of Father William Rice. Father Stack is remembered for his commitment in 1925 to visit every retreat house in the United States and bring back to El Retiro the best features from each program. “For 50 years, Father Stack has been a successful salesman in the employ of Christ, selling stock in the Kingdom of God.”

Father Edwin McFadden, S.J., served as Superior from 1934-1941, during a period of intense growth at El Retiro. Among his contributions as Superior, he saw to the construction of an extensive wing to Loyola Hall adding 18 more rooms for retreatants, but he might best be known for establishing The Half-Dollar Club in 1936. “Without it, El Retiro simply could not have survived.”



Photo Source: Jesuit Archives and Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

Half-Dollar Club

In the July 1936 Bulletin of the Catholic Laymen's Retreat Association, members were asked to suggest ways of solving a financial crisis. Much needed repairs to existing buildings would be postponed if El Retiro couldn't identify a debt-reduction plan. It was in an eloquent letter to the Association members that Father Edwin McFadden introduced the idea of the Half-Dollar Club. He asked 2500 members to give fifty cents a month to reduce the debt. If all 2500 gave, the principle and debt would be paid off in three years. Coin cards were mailed. Members were asked to reach out to retreatants they knew. What happened? In the first ten months of the campaign, the \$33,000 debt was reduced by \$10,000! Father McFadden wrote again:

"STOP, LOOK, LISTEN AND SHOUT! Our debt has been reduced by \$10,000.00! Congratulations a thousand-fold, and multiplied thanks to all the members of the El Retiro Half-Dollar Club. Truly, this has been a remarkable achievement."

Who were these men? They came from all walks of life: doctors, lawyers, businessmen, farmers, policemen, firemen, clerks, engineers. They were also the benefactors of stained-glass windows in Rossi Chapel, statues, shrines, vestments, and notably, the Via Dolorosa with its 14 Stations of the Cross, Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, and at the highest point on the grounds – "The Christ of El Retiro," a replica of the Christ of the Andes. Thanks to Catholic Laymen: members of Knights of Columbus, Young Men's Institute, Hibernians, St. Vincent de Paul, and Holy Name Societies, El Retiro flourished. Its growth honored the legacy of these very important contributors with what they most desired:

"A place to discover where God will be best served and where people will best be helped; to show love in deeds and not just words."

We don't have to imagine today that the Half-Dollar Club formed almost 80 years ago, kept its promise. Jesuits and laymen and laywomen made sure The Jesuit Retreat Center would continue for years to come. Thanks to many "remarkable achievements," we can celebrate one-hundred years. We have much more to learn about the decades that followed.

Teaser alert: *there was a 'dream' plan.*

Pat Clough is a writer living in Palo Alto, CA. She is a second year student in the Pierre Favre program and a frequent retreatant at El Retiro. She is our guide through this journey in time at The Jesuit Retreat Center.

Upcoming Events

October 2024

Centennial Newsletter Series



"Be Still and know that I Am God!"

October 25 - 27, 2024

Gardening Morning

October 26, 2024

5-Day Guided Retreat

October 30 - November 3, 2024

**Sacred Sorrows: Grieving Mothers
"Return & Renew" Retreat**

November 7 - 10, 2024

**"Blessed are you among Women": An
Advent retreat with Mary**

November 22 - 24, 2024

FOR MORE EVENTS



Centennial Garden Dedication

Fundraising Event

October 27, 2024

4:00 pm - 8:00 pm

<https://www.jrclosaltos.org/centennialgarden2024>