

Loyola Club

by Paul Kruse

“LOYOLA CLUB is best described as a gathering of Jesuit-educated alumni for food, fellowship and inspiration,” says John FitzGerald, one of the club’s founding members. “Loyola Club probes ways to apply Jesuit Spirituality in our current lives and strengthen our community. The idea of service to others never grows old as we continue to learn, earn, and be Men and Women for Others.”

Founded in 2007, Cleveland’s Loyola Club holds regular luncheons, bringing together 220–240 Jesuit-educated alumni and their friends. In addition to networking opportunities, each luncheon also features a speaker. Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, the founder of the Cristo Rey network of schools, spoke at a recent luncheon. “The room was packed with lots of people paying close attention,” he recalls. “It was a very friendly, eager atmosphere. There was just a lot of interest in what I had been invited to speak about.”

Other speakers have included Chuck “Chico” Kyle, the longtime St. Ignatius High School football coach; Fr. Otto Hentz, SJ, of Georgetown University; Fr. Tim Kesicki, SJ, former president of St. Ignatius High School in Cleveland who is now provincial of the Chicago and Detroit Provinces; Chris Lowney who gave a presentation on his book *Heroic Leadership*; and Fr. Myles Sheehan, SJ, a medical doctor who now serves as provincial of the New England Province.

“The Loyola Club Luncheon was a wonderful event,” says Fr. Sheehan. “I was impressed by the interest, dedication and desire of the attendees to find out more about the Society and to hear about relevant issues from a faith perspective.”

John FitzGerald, a native of Parma Heights just outside Cleveland, graduated from St. Ignatius High School in 1983 and John Carroll University in 1987. “When I look at my 20 years in the insurance industry, it becomes clear that many of the moves I have made have been because of a Jesuit connection.” It was because of these Jesuit connections that John helped create Loyola Club.

It began when John realized the number of people in his area

who are connected to the Jesuits. “I happened to have the alumni directory for John Carroll online,” John remembers. “So, I did a search for the zip code I worked in. It was surprising. There was something like a thousand John Carroll alums just in that zip code. A friend of mine had the Ignatius directory on CD and he did a search. There were another thousand St. Ignatius Alums

in that same zip code.” It occurred to John how amazing it would be if there were a way to gather and connect the large amount of alumni from various Jesuit institutions in one place. So, he had the idea for a luncheon.

“We organized a steering meeting in February of 2007,” says John. “There were about 12 of us. I proposed the idea and everyone said, ‘yep, that sounds good.’ At the end of that meeting, we came up with Loyola Club.” John recruited table organizers to take on the responsibility of bringing about 10 people to fill one table for

a given luncheon. It works as a very practical networking strategy. One table organizer will bring a table full of people and next time some of those people might do the same.

“For the first Loyola club lunch, I relied heavily on people that I knew from the John Carroll and the Ignatius community,” John recalls. It didn’t take long, though, for word to spread and for more and more people to get involved. Loyola now draws individuals from many Jesuit institutions, including alumni from Xavier University and Alpha Sigma Nu (Jesuit Honor Society).

He attributes this success to the direct and simple nature of the event. Quoting a friend and Loyola Club member, John says, “It’s not a fundraiser. It’s just a lunch during which we are exploring our Catholic identity, our Jesuit spirituality, and we’re trying to become better in the process.”

“John has done a great job of rallying a number of people with different Jesuit connections and getting them involved in the Loyola Club,” says Bonnie Gwin, a Georgetown alumna. “The Loyola Club is immensely lucky to have John involved. He really epitomizes ‘a man for others.’” ■



John FitzGerald (second from the right) drew from Jesuit connections to help create Loyola Club. He stands with (left to right) Fairfield alumnus Robert Loesch; Michael Singurse, SJ, a regent at St. Ignatius; and Georgetown alumna Bonnie Gwin, who serves on the steering committee for Loyola Club.

For more information on upcoming events from the Loyola Club of Cleveland, visit www.loyolaclub.com

Interested in beginning a Jesuit alumni networking club in Detroit, Cincinnati, or Chicago?

Please contact Tim Freeman at tffreeman@jesuits-chgdet.org or (773) 975-6909.

