

Universal Brother AWARD

The Universal Brother Award is presented by the Jesus Caritas Fraternity USA at its annual gathering to a Diocesan priest who exemplifies the spirituality of Blessed Charles de Foucauld and has discovered through his message a way of living the Gospel more fully to the ends of the earth, in fraternal sharing with his brother priests, in caring for the least among us, and in silent adoration of our Eucharistic Lord. We were happy to announce on October 15th during the National Retreat that this year's recipient is Fr. Jim O'Donnell. Unfortunately, on his way to the National Retreat, Jim fell ill, so John Jacquel delivered the award to Jim on his way home from the Retreat.

Fr. Jim O'Donnell was ordained a priest in 1956 for the Diocese of Cleveland. His spiritual journey has led him through parish work and youth ministry. He served as the director of CYO for several years. For six weeks in 1974 he worked in India with Mother Teresa. Jim also spent time with Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche communities, and through that friendship was instrumental in establishing the l'Arche homes in Cleveland. Jim also was inspired by another Canadian, Fr. Jacques LeClerc who brought the fraternities of Brother Charles to the American continent by way of Montreal. Jim in turn established both lay and priest fraternities in Cleveland. For many years he has been the responsible for the October Jesus Caritas Retreat for Northeast Ohio.

Until recently, for 32 years, Jim lived and worked in the inner-city Central neighborhood in Cleveland. He, along with little sister Maggie Walsh-Conrad, formed the Community of the Little Brothers and Sisters of the Eucharist, to provide a ministry of presence to the poor of the neighborhood. The Community was instrumental in bringing Habitat for Humanity to the Central neighborhood which

sparked a transformation of the area to include nearly 600 new homes. During these years, Fr. Jim also served as the Catholic Chaplain to the Northeast Prerelease Prison for Women.

Fr. Jim will often refer fondly to "his children", which is usually and understandably a surprise to people that don't know him – but as the years have gone by, Jim often forgets this and casually speaks of the foster children he has helped raise as if they were his own blood. The idea for a foster program started about 40 years ago. Little sister Maggie asked Fr. Jim if he would be open to taking in some foster children. He recalls, "there were too many of

these kids being hurt, and perhaps we can help them in some way. So that's how it began." Through the years and his work at Little Brothers and Sisters of the Eucharist (formed by Sister Maggie and himself) and the Central City Ministry with the Poor, Fr. Jim and Sister Maggie have helped raise 14 children into adulthood.



