



# Hands of healing

## CATHOLIC CHAPLAINS FILL HOSPITAL HALLS WITH JOY AND STRENGTH

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAY COLBY

**W**hen Father Peter Paul Ibeagha walks down the hall at Cleveland Clinic Fairview Hospital, he's often greeted with lots of smiles and hugs. Father Peter Paul is a priest on loan from the Catholic Diocese of Mamfe in Cameroon and began his ministry here as a hospital chaplain in March 2024, after arriving from Africa. The joy that radiates from his face reflects how much he loves his work.

"I pray for all the patients. I pray for the doctors. I pray for the nurses. I pray for all the care-givers," he said. As a priest, he also administers sacraments such as baptism, anointing of the sick, Communion and confession, as well as administering the last rites, when necessary.

Father Peter Paul is one of 13 priests in the Diocese of Cleveland who cover 15 hospitals across Northeast Ohio, according to Father Joe Mamich, secretary and vicar for clergy and religious.

"In our biggest hospitals, it is a priest who is pretty much full-time assigned to do that," he explained. "In some cases, they have another shared

ministry, but more often than not, it's somebody who's dedicated completely to the ministry to the sick."

At the larger hospitals, the priests are often part of a team of interfaith chaplains working to address the needs of patients in a holistic manner that involves the mind, body and soul.

"Spiritual care is so important because it is an essential component of healing and well-being as folks are going through difficult diagnoses and treatments. They're being impacted in so many ways than just beyond their body," said Lisa Zambarano, senior director of the Center for Spiritual Care at the Cleveland Clinic.





### LEARN MORE

For a list of area hospitals with priests assigned to them, visit [dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/clergy-religious/hospital-chaplains](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/clergy-religious/hospital-chaplains)

Scan the QR code to watch a video of Father Peter Paul in action.



The center is home to a cadre of interfaith chaplains who work to ensure that people of all religious backgrounds and beliefs feel welcome.

“Given the large population of Catholics in this area, it is crucial for us to be able to have good working relationships with our Catholic priests and having priests assigned to our hospitals and working right here with us is valuable beyond words,” she added. At the Cleveland Clinic’s Main Campus, the Catholic priests celebrate Mass five days a week in the hospital’s chapel.

Father Cirilo Nacorda, known as “Father Loi,” has served as a chaplain at Main

Campus for the past 15 years. He says he feels at home there because the spiritual care team is like a family. Born and raised in the Philippines, Father Loi came to the U.S. in 2003 after many harrowing experiences, which included facing some life-threatening illnesses as a child.

“I feel I can relate well to the patients I visit,” he said. “I feel I have a calling to give comfort and peace to the sick and the dying.”

Father Joe wants to make more people aware of the diocesan priests who are based at local hospitals because they are an important way of extending the community of caring. He said just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes the entire Church community to care for the sick. People often assume the first clergy member they should call when dealing with a hospitalization is their parish priest, without realizing that there may also be a priest on site at the medical facility. Connecting with the hospital-based priest may lead to a more timely visit since parish priests are often pulled in many directions, sometimes pastoring two parishes and possibly overseeing a school.

“These men who are in our hospitals along with the lay ministers who come and bring Communion really extend the work of the parish. So, it doesn’t fall particularly just to the parish priest,” Father Joe explained.

Meanwhile, back at Fairview Hospital it’s early afternoon and Father Peter Paul is sitting at the bedside of Jim Ferega, a patient who was just readmitted with a blood

infection. Jim is a cradle Catholic and belongs to Holy Family Parish in Parma. Jim beams with pride as he shows Father Peter Paul a tribute video stored on his cell phone that he created to honor his wife, who died in 2023.

“She died a week after our 55th anniversary. Since then, my health has kind of deteriorated a little bit,” said Jim. “I feel my faith right now is everything. It’s what I hang on to. It’s what gives me hope, and it’s what I use to get through what I’m going through,” he added.

“With someone like Jim,

my first job is to listen,” said Father Peter Paul.

“Then, after listening, you uplift their spirit with words of Scripture and with experiences and other things. When Jim talked about his wife who passed away, we went through it and saw the good moments in it. Sometimes people tend to be negative, but we try to make it positive,” he added.

“We’re here to bring you Jesus Christ. Jesus is the greatest healer and the super physician. The doctors heal you with medicine that is for the body. But we are here for your soul and for your spirit.” †

