

John J. Cecero, S.J.

John J. Cecero, S.J., grew up in Philadelphia, where as a young boy he pretended to celebrate Mass for the neighborhood children. It was while attending St. Joseph's Prep that he first encountered the Jesuits and was struck by the joy and humor they exuded in their mission to teach and share the gospel. His ongoing call from the Holy Spirit and his experience with the Jesuits led Father Cecero to enter the Society of Jesus in September of 1976. After two years in the novitiate, he attended Gonzaga University, studied in Paris for a year, and received his undergraduate degree in philosophy. He then went on to earn a master's degree in divinity and a master's degree in theology from the Weston Jesuit School of Theology. He was ordained to the priesthood in June of 1989, before continuing his education at George Washington University, earning a master's degree in philosophy and a doctorate in clinical psychology.

One of Father Cecero's first assignments as a Jesuit priest – one he admits was an unexpected tug from the Holy Spirit – was to direct retreats at the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Growth in Wernersville, Pa.

Although he only served for two years, it was a transformative time for him. Leading retreats on Ignatian spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises helped him focus on his strengths and discern for the future. Following post-doctoral work in psychology at Yale University, specializing in substance abuse, Father Cecero began what would become a 15-year tenure as a professor of psychology at Fordham University, where he also served as superior of the Spellman Hall Jesuit Community and started his own psychology practice.

It was during this time that Father Cecero was asked to lead a series of talks for other clergy on the topics of substance abuse, wellness and leadership. His passion for combining spirituality and psychology made his discussions so well received that he was tapped to serve concurrently as a province consultor for the New York Province. In 2014, Father Cecero received from Superior General Adolfo Nicolás in Rome the mission to serve as provincial for the newly formed USA Northeast Province. He currently serves as the vice president for mission integration and ministry.

With the USA Northeast Province now planning to canonically unify with the Maryland Province to launch a new Jesuits USA East Coast Province, Father Cecero chuckles at the reality that upon stepping down, he will have been both the first and last provincial of the Northeast Province.