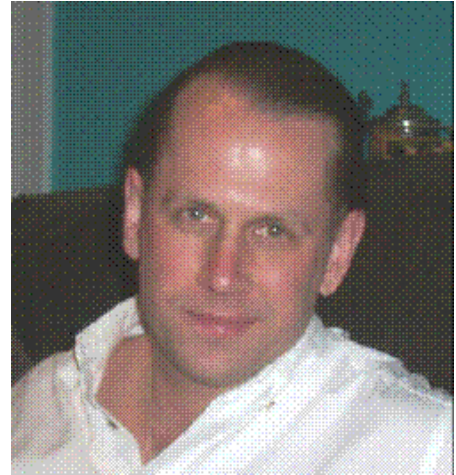


**Fred Rottnek,**  
**MD, MAHCM, 2006 Ethical Society of St. Louis Humanist of the Year**

Fred Rottnek, M.D., MAHCM, has been chosen to receive the 2006 Ethical Humanist of the Year Award. This prestigious award was established 30 years ago by James S. McDonnell in honor of Jeff Hornback, then the Leader of the Ethical Society of St. Louis.

Dr. Rottnek's life integrates the practice of medicine with his love of teaching, commitment to social justice, spirituality, and theology. His patients are the homeless and those incarcerated in St. Louis County. His current positions include:



- ⤴ Director of Community Services at the Institute for Research and Education in Family Medicine (IREFM) of which he was a founding physician. IREFM is a non-profit corporation devoted to improving access to quality health care for the poor and most seriously disadvantaged. IREFM develops innovative community partnerships which are designed to promote and deliver health care to marginalized people.
- ⤴ Chief physician in corrections medicine at the St. Louis County Department of Health.
- ⤴ Assistant director of the Aquinas Institute of Theology's Master of Arts in Health Care Ministry program; in 2004, Dr. Rottnek was among the first cohort of students in the country to earn an M.A. in Health Care Mission.
- ⤴ Volunteer faculty, residency training program for physicians at the Forest Park Hospital (formerly Deaconess Hospital).

Additionally, Dr. Rottnek has worked with many local homeless shelters and non-profit agencies, providing direct, on-site health care services to people in shelters and other locations where they go to obtain goods and services needed for their day to day survival.

As Herbert Bersen of the St. Louis County Department of Justice Services observes, "Providing medical care to an inmate population is not a position that many other doctors would seek. Dr. Rottnek has not only sought the position, he has embraced it." In St. Louis County, he was the first physician to utilize community volunteers to establish a hospice environment for prisoners approaching death.

Dr. Rottnek's work is not something he stumbled upon. He is an activist for social justice and a patient advocate. His own life experiences and convictions led him to discover within what he considers his call to purpose, his vocation. Dr. Rottnek's path to his profession is an illustration of the wisdom: "Before you tell your life what you intend it to do for you, listen for what it intends to do for you" found in Parker Palmer's book, *Let Your Life Speak*.

In addition to his work with the incarcerated and coordinating care for as many as 50 patients in an evening at a homeless shelter, he has organized many other physicians, nurses, psychologists, and social workers to use their time and talents to deliver health care to people living outside the fringes of the

work-a-day world. He inspires a myriad of professionals to understand their importance and value to the patients they serve. According to Father Bouchard of the Aquinas Institute of Theology, "Fred stands out for me as a man of singular purpose. He possesses extraordinary and versatile gifts. He is a natural leader."

Dr. Rottnek grew up in St. Louis and his personal background is noteworthy. Although his family came from modest means, he attended an academically rigorous and prestigious college preparatory school. While classmates often had cars and money to spare, Dr. Rottnek took the Bi-State bus to school and helped his family in their hardware business. After graduating as valedictorian of his high school class, he continued to distinguish himself by becoming the first member of his family to attend college. He graduated with honors in Chemistry and a minor in Art History from Furman University in South Carolina. Upon graduation and at 21 years of age, he was accepted into graduate programs at M.I.T., Harvard, Cornell and Columbia. As 1 of 30 recipients in the nation of a National Science Foundation National Institute of Health scholarship, he was guaranteed a "full ride" at the university of his choice. He was on a fast track (or, as he puts it, a conveyor belt) to academic distinction and the certainty of a prestigious career. In 1986, at the age of 21, Fred Rottnek entered Harvard for advanced training in his chosen field of Chemistry. However, this was not to be his career. He withdrew from the program and returned to St. Louis after experiencing the on-set of a major depressive episode.

During those difficult years, Fred Rottnek became a high school chemistry teacher. He taught for 2 years at Cor Jesu Academy. For a very short period, he became a seminary student, intending to join the Jesuits. Following his return to St. Louis, he became an uninsured psychiatric patient who received treatment primarily by resident physicians completing their residencies at the Wohl Clinic.

In 1991, during his recovery from serious depression, he entered St. Louis University Medical School, intending to become a psychiatrist. As a medical student, Dr. Rottnek was drawn to family medicine as he discovered how much he enjoyed working in a healing relationship with patients of all ages. Dr. David Campbell notes that, despite the time consuming grind of postgraduate medical education, he demonstrated commitment to social justice and patient advocacy. "As a student, Dr. Rottnek was already actively involved in community service, not only personally, committing a couple of evenings a week as a volunteer at area homeless shelters, but also organizing others to participate as well."

Dr. Rottnek now looks back on the period of his life in which he experienced depression, life as a clinic patient and high school chemistry teacher and sees that these experiences laid the foundation for his life's work. He learned that he loved teaching. He had also gained the ground's eye view of the health care delivery system available to the poor as he sat next to other uninsured mental patients waiting to see their doctors in training. Dr. Rottnek came to know the importance of learners at all levels of health education. Today he uses that knowledge when he teaches medical students to be aware of their value and duty to those with limited or no access to health care.

A final insight into what inspires and motivates our 2006 Ethical Humanist of the Year in his vocation is best provided by the awardee himself. Dr. Fred Rottnek says "The quality of all of our lives depends on the quality of the life of those who have the least."