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Beginnings (Brief History, Sacred Heart University)

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BEGINNINGS

Reflections on the 'early days' of Sacred Heart University,
from Vision to Realization; with affection and gratitude to
those intrepid colleagues who took the first steps with me.

William H. Conley

FOREWORD

In no sense can this small offering be termed a History.

One decade is too short a time to place events in any kind of perspective, and more years must pass before the chronicle of the events which occurred between 1962 and 1972 can be viewed with the objectivity necessary to true historical treatment.

When the time comes for a history to be written, many documents will be available from which to draw. One such document is Dr. John Rycenga's excellent study, "Project Innovation" prepared in 1967-68, the first part of which sets forth a history of the Diocese of Bridgeport and the beginnings of Sacred Heart University.

A second document is an article written by J. Victory Baldrich for the American Council on Education while he was a doctoral candidate at Yale University. Mr. Baldrich had been commissioned to study several new institutions, Sacred Heart University being one of them, and in 1968 he submitted his report: "Sacred Heart University: a case study of a new Institution."

Among data collected by Mr. Matzek for the Library in the files of the University is a complete set of the Minutes of Faculty meetings and the Faculty Council concerning all of the educational policies since the beginning of the University. Also on file are the total Minutes of the meetings of the Board of Trustees of the University from its first meeting, and the voluminous record of the legal proceedings against the four Connecticut institutions of Higher Education in connection with Federal Grants received for construction -- including the new Library at Sacred Heart University.

Yearbooks, catalogues and news clippings are also in Mr. Matzek's files.

Concurrently with my gathering together these few reflections Dr. Herbert Clish, my close associate and friend, has prepared a series of taped interviews with those who came in the first days to help in the planning and establishing of Sacred Heart -- I will depend on their recollections to add to and to reinforce these pages.

In sifting and interpreting material one finds it extremely difficult to remain totally objective - even with the device of the third person narrative. Emotions of nostalgia, some regrets, find their way into the sentences. To accept the responsibility of founding President of an institution a thousand miles away is one thing -- to look back upon that acceptance and the events that transpired as a result is quite another -- even from the vantage point of ten years.

The recitation of a few names which loom large in retrospect in no way ignores the many dedicated persons who were an essential part of those years, they all know who they are, and they know I could not have done it without them, and that I am grateful to them.

THE SETTING

In the early 1960's, Catholic education in America attained the zenith of its quality and its acceptance. The prestige of Catholic education was widely recognized. Students were literally storming the doors of our institutions, insisting upon admission. Schools were filled to capacity and new ones were opening each year. A "margin of difference" between Catholic schools and other schools was acknowledged by Catholic parents and by young people. They believed that education included more than the "three R's", that there must be a fourth "R", which was Religious Education. This point of view was also widely expressed by the clergy and by Catholic educators throughout the country.

In the newly created Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Catholic elementary and secondary education, which had been comparatively restricted, was beginning to expand. At the time of the creation of the Diocese there were only thirty-one elementary schools in the sixty-one parishes of the Diocese. Of these, half were in the City of Bridgeport. The first Diocesan High School opened in September of 1956 as a co-institutional effort staffed jointly by the School Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Holy Cross Fathers. This marked the beginning of a rapid expansion of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in Fairfield County -- due in great part to the vision and energy of the first Bishop of the new diocese, Lawrence Shehan.

In 1961 Bishop Shehan was named Archbishop of Baltimore, Maryland, and Bishop Walter W. Curtis, Auxiliary of the Diocese of Newark, New Jersey, became the second Bishop of the Diocese of Bridgeport. New schools, churches, a home for the aged, an urban recreational center, which had been sorely needed in Bridgeport, were enthusiastically encouraged by Bishop Curtis. He applauded the phenomenal growth of Catholic education in the diocese and envisioned even further expansion. He noted that within ten years the population of Fairfield County would include 48,000 young men and women of college age, of whom approximately 92% would desire education beyond high school. Most of these young people would be at least nominally Catholic, but only two institutions in the area offered high school graduates an opportunity to continue their education under Catholic auspices. Neither of these was coeducational, and one was beyond the boundaries of the diocese. Large numbers of students would be compelled to attend colleges at great distances, with the increased cost of living away from home or would enter secular institutions.

Bishop Curtis had a keen pastoral concern for everyone in his diocese and so he moved energetically toward the creation of a Catholic college for men and women in the Diocese of Bridgeport. In addition to his pastoral concern, the Bishop's own background influenced considerably

his decision to open a diocesan college. A native of New Jersey, Bishop Curtis had attended Seton Hall University in South Orange, and later a diocesan seminary in Newark. He recognized that for nearly a century Seton Hall University had been a tremendous educational and cultural force in the Diocese of Newark, and he believed that a similar institution in Bridgeport could accomplish the same results for his new diocese.

Another factor in his decision to open a college was the existence of an exceptionally fine campus with school buildings which had been erected as a high school by his predecessor. From the time of his first visit to this campus Bishop Curtis had felt that these buildings and this site were admirably suited to a college operation accessible to all young people in the diocese. Furthermore, he believed that the Notre Dame High School buildings could not be the prototype of the many new diocesan high schools which he planned to construct, which would have to be far less costly and less elaborate. The possibility of utilizing the centrally located facilities of this campus loomed large in the plans for the future of Catholic higher education in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

After receiving his Licentiate in Rome and his Doctorate in Theology at the Catholic University of America, Bishop Curtis had spent fifteen years as a professor in the Diocesan Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, Darlington, New Jersey. Because of this background he was thoroughly conversant with the history of Catholic education in the United States and aware of the intense need for colleges to develop informed Catholic laymen of the future.

Vatican II, which was about to convene, gave additional impetus to expanding education for the Catholic layman, and was to have a profound effect on the changing character of Catholic education throughout the world. The Council aimed to bring together and to explore New Directions for the Church, a topic which had been discussed for many decades by Catholic intellectual leaders. Bishop Curtis took an active part in the Vatican Council, and brought back to the United States many newly formalized directions and opinions which he himself had considered and held for many years.

While the Bishop's decision to establish a diocesan Catholic College was reached in the first year of his episcopate, it was in the summer of 1962 that he acted to make this dream a reality. At this time he appointed a Committee to formulate plans for the institution, later to be known as Sacred Heart College. In addition to the Bishop himself, who served as Chairman, the committee included: Monsignor John F. McGough, then Diocesan Superintendent of Schools, Monsignor James P. Devine, who was Chancellor of the Diocese, James R. Kerr, President of AVCO Corporation,

and Donald H. McGannon, President of Westinghouse Broadcasting Corporation. These men brought to the task experience in education, knowledge of financial and organizational affairs, and a wide understanding of Fairfield County and of its educational needs.

While Bishop Curtis was in Rome for the meetings of the Vatican Council, his committee for the formation of the new college met regularly and made many decisions. First, they concurred with and agreed to implement the Bishop's decision to establish a college; secondly, they decided on its form and its location; thirdly, they began their search for a President and an administrative staff for the proposed institution.

The Committee had decided that the new school would be Catholic, coeducational, primarily liberal arts, located in Bridgeport and administered by a staff of Catholic laymen. They gave serious consideration to a name for the new college, to the appropriate time for its opening, and to many other details, and discussed these with the Bishop on his return from Rome. Bishop Curtis listened to their recommendations, concurred in them, but was insistent on two points: that the name should be Sacred Heart College, and that classes should begin in September 1963. An undecided issue was whether Sacred Heart should be a highly selective institution of the elitist type or a community oriented college for students of varying abilities and interests.

After filing an application for a license to open the new college, the members of the Committee then began their systematic search for a President and other administrative officers. They narrowed the roster of possible candidates for President to 23 persons, interviewed all of them and in January of 1963 offered the post to Dr. William H. Conley, Educational Assistant to the President of Marquette University in Wisconsin. Because Sacred Heart University was to be lay administered and a completely separate corporation from the Diocese, although initially supported by the Diocese, he accepted the Presidency.

In his interviews Dr. Conley had urged the appointment of Maurice O'Sullivan of Seton Hall University as Dean of the new college. Several conferences were held and Dr. O'Sullivan accepted the post on condition that he be named Vice-President as well as Dean. Dr. Conley agreed to this, although he pointed out that the size of the college would probably not warrant a Vice-President for some years. Both men were elected and were introduced to the clergy of the diocese at a luncheon on February 14, 1963.

The President-elect had serious misgivings on two issues. First was the financing of the new college which he fully realized would involve

major problems and considerable expense. He discussed this concern with Presidents of other Catholic colleges who insisted that in order to start a new institution at least one and one half million dollars would be needed, for operating expense, in addition to buildings and physical equipment.

The second concern was the practicality of beginning classes in September, 1963, less than eight months away. To meet this date would necessitate not only the recruitment of students, but the difficult task of seeking and engaging a beginning faculty. Many colleges were expanding and qualified teachers were in great demand at that time. In addition there were the physical problems of converting the present building for use as a college while Notre Dame High School students were still to be housed, pending construction of their new school buildings. These involved new laboratories, classroom changes and a library. Also, administrative and faculty offices would have to be planned and constructed. For all these reasons the President urged the postponement of the opening of the new college until September 1964; nevertheless the Bishop felt that Sacred Heart must open in 1963 as announced, the Board of Incorporators so ruled, and the President reluctantly agreed to open the University to Freshmen in the Fall of 1963.

In their discussions with the new President, the Board of Incorporators, later to become the Board of Trustees, reiterated their earlier decisions that the new college should be co-educational, commuter-oriented, that it should be a liberal arts institution; they stated that diocesan support would be forthcoming to finance the changeover of facilities for college use, and also to cover deficits incurred in the organizational phase of the new institution. Their assurances did much to relieve Dr. Conley's concern, except for the still overwhelming problem of literally creating a college library where none existed. The Incorporators and the Diocesan Office then agreed that in addition to covering the organization and transformation expenses, the Diocese would provide \$50,000. a year for a period of five years for the purpose of building a library collection. They also affirmed their intention of paying whatever deficits the college would incur during its first five years. This five-year program was adopted because the President had advised the Incorporators that the new institution could not be at a breakeven point for at least five years, and then only when an Evening Division was sufficiently established to absorb the costs of the deficits which were certain to occur in the operation of the day college.

No prediction was possible on the opening enrollment of the college, and it was clear that the college would seek an enrollment of 1200 to 1250 students only after it had become a regionally accredited institution and was firmly established in the community. The President understood very clearly the financial aid which would be necessary for the new institution and it also appeared to be the understanding of the Incorporators and the Diocese

as indicated in the application filed for the proposed college with the State Board of Education.

Now a decision had to be made as to whether Sacred Heart College should be a selective, elitist institution, intended only for students of superior ability. The President spoke strongly in opposition to this concept. He pointed out that New England private schools were largely of this type, while the need in Bridgeport was clearly for a community-oriented institution, designed to provide opportunities for students of all levels of ability. He felt that the new institution would not attract a sufficient number of students if it were highly selective and catered only to an elite group. The Incorporators accepted Dr. Conley's strong recommendation that Sacred Heart should be a community-oriented institution and should provide for students of various levels of ability.

During these preliminary planning activities the Board was making arrangements for the chartering and licensing of the new school. Monsignor McGough had been in contact with the State Department of Education and had been working with Dr. Mowat Frazier who was the Department's man in Higher Education. Dr. Frazier had outlined the detailed steps the Incorporators would have to take and Monsignor McGough proceeded to follow them. He first prepared answers to a long questionnaire for the Study Committee on Licensing and Accreditation. This included potential enrollment, plan of study, facilities including library and finance. When it was discovered this committee would not meet to pass on the proposed institution until spring, the Board decided to petition the state legislature for a charter for a university. On March 14, 1963 the State Legislature granted a charter for Sacred Heart University. The State Department of Education issued a temporary license subject to a review by the State's Standing Committee on Accreditation in the first year of operation. The President and Dean then proceeded with the necessary steps for the recruitment of Faculty and Students.

From his first meeting with the Presidential Search Committee, Dr. Conley had been much impressed by the assurance that Sacred Heart was to be administered by laymen. From many years experience in the National Catholic Education Association, he was aware that in the past Catholic laymen had been generally restricted in the areas of educational administration, often occupying administrative posts on a temporary basis until a religious should become available. Admittedly it was true that laymen had risen to important positions in certain fields, such as Deans of Law or Commerce, occasionally Deans of Education and frequently in areas of fund raising and public relations, where the availability of clergy and religious was most limited. But relatively few laymen had become Presidents of Catholic colleges and in some cases these were only nominal heads of their institutions.

The desire to see the field of Catholic education open to qualified lay administrators had been articulated by Dr. Conley throughout many years of active participation in National organizations. In 1962 when he was President of the College and University Department of the National Catholic Education Association, he was invited to deliver the keynote address at the Association's annual Convention - a first for a Catholic layman. In his address in Detroit, on April 24, 1962, Dr. Conley developed the thesis that Catholic laymen had an apostolic mission in the field of education. He lamented the fact that in policy formation in the governance of Catholic educational institutions the laymen still had a long way to go, but he pointed out that, in spite of no apparent room at the top, "there are now (1962) two lay teachers for every priest or religious in Catholic colleges and universities", and he emphasized that it must be made possible for laymen to play an increasingly significant role in the Catholic schools of the future.

FIRST FACULTY

By 1963 many Catholic laymen had become qualified in various areas of college administration and were ready to take over significant roles in the Catholic schools - roles formerly restricted to sisters, brothers and clergy trained for these advanced positions. Hence, Dr. Conley immediately began a search for the best qualified laymen for the new faculty. The Vice-President and Dean, Maurice O'Sullivan, had been elected by the Board of Incorporators on the recommendation of the President, and in March they elected as Librarian, Mr. William Ready, of national reputation and his Assistant Librarian, Mr. Richard Matzek, from Marquette University.

The search now was for qualified teaching faculty, either already possessing the Doctorate or candidates for that degree, committed to the objectives and purposes of the new college. During these months Dr. Conley's work with the Carnegie Study of Catholic Education took him throughout the midwest, to Washington and to New York. He visited the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Loyola University and Marquette University seeking persons qualified and interested.

The schedule of faculty salaries was as follows: Instructor \$6,000-\$8,000; Assistant Professor \$8,000-\$10,000; Associate Professor \$10,000-\$12,000; Professor \$12,000 and above. The President sought mostly instructors at this time, and in addition to salaries he offered fringe benefits with health and hospital insurance, a TIAA pension plan, Major Medical Insurance and Social Security. He was also quite definite in talking with prospective faculty members that the Diocese was giving financial subsidy to the new institution which would therefore have financial stability. He was very sincere in promising this to prospective teachers for the new college. He knew that mere advances could not be repaid in the foreseeable future and that the college would be fortunate if it were able to balance its operating budget in a period of five years.

Since the new college was to be community-oriented, with the majority of its students from the local area, it was important to bring to these students a wide range of experiences and points of view. To meet this need, the President believed that faculty members should come from diversified backgrounds and should have studied and taught in various geographic regions.

The announcement of the new institution in the Catholic and Secular press brought forth a flood of communications from laymen in Catholic colleges and universities throughout the United States who were interested in this new type of Catholic institution under lay control. Most of them

appeared to be only inquiries - in general faculty members hesitated to leave their established institutions to come to this new college.

As a result of his visits to other universities, Dr. Conley was able to contract with Alan Reinerman, who was completing his doctoral work in History at Loyola University, Chicago and with William Kilbourne, whose field was English and who was from Northwestern University. He also negotiated a contract with Mrs. Marcella Malloy who had taught Spanish for many years in the Chicago Public High Schools and who, in addition to a Master's Degree from the University of Chicago, had done graduate work in Mexico, at the University of Illinois and at Northwestern University. Shortly after coming to Bridgeport, the President issued a contract to John Croffy from Seton Hall University to be an instructor in Mathematics and the first Registrar and Director of Admissions.

Added to the first faculty as a result of applications made directly to the school were Anthony Pinciario (in Science), a graduate of Fairfield University with an M.S. from Boston College, a former teacher at Newton College in Boston and recently from industry in Bridgeport; Lawrence Skane in Mathematics who had recently received an M.A. at Purdue University; and Maureen Lynch, who had received her Masters degree at Marquette University in English and was pursuing a doctoral program in the area. Reverend John Polinsky, a priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport, had been appointed the first Chaplain of the college by Bishop Curtis and was designated Instructor in Theology. The beginning Faculty was completed with the appointment of the Reverend Neville Brazier-Creagh, educated at Oxford and in Paris, to be Instructor in French. This first faculty was enthusiastic over the new school, was conscientious, and worked well together. Only four of them accepted positions in other institutions during the first ten years of operations of Sacred Heart University.

The selection of this first Faculty had been the result of a conscious effort to bring to a new institution a variety of points of view. Since the majority of the students would be from Fairfield County or the immediately surrounding area, the President felt that the Faculty would have to provide a bridge of experience from other institutions. Thus in the Faculty that first year were represented Northwestern University, University of Chicago, Loyola University, Purdue University, Marquette University, Seton Hall University, Boston College and a great University in England. The Librarian had his degree from University of Cardiff in Wales, and his assistant had a Master's Degree from the University of Wisconsin. It was clear that such a faculty brought a remarkable diversified background on which to establish a tradition of liberal education for the fortunate young students about to begin their studies.

THE LIBRARY

Even before making his own decision to accept the Presidency of the new Sacred Heart University, Dr. Conley had discussed the proposed institution and the challenge it presented to Catholic laymen with some of his colleagues. One of these men was William Ready, a native of Wales, who had a distinguished career in Library administration in Canada, California, Minnesota and in Wisconsin at Marquette University. So enthusiastic was Mr. Ready about this new apostolate for Catholic educators that he promptly offered himself as a candidate for the post of Director of the Library for the college. Moreover, his enthusiasm was contagious and he was able to persuade his able and talented young assistant, Richard Matzek, to go to Connecticut with him.

This unexpected and important strength in an area so vital to the development of the new institution was immediately communicated to the Board of Incorporators, and the election of Mr. Ready and Mr. Matzek was recommended and approved.

In March 1963, shortly after Mr. Ready had been named Director of the library, he began planning for the collection at Sacred Heart University. He first decided on the necessary holdings for the Reference Section: encyclopediae, dictionaries and other standard reference works and ordered them from American publishers. Second, he decided to make a trip to England during the summer to select and purchase from bookshops in London and in other centers of the English speaking world, previously owned volumes. Before any books arrived he began planning for the use of the existing library facilities of Notre Dame High School with the idea in mind that Notre Dame and Sacred Heart would utilize the same library space. He placed orders for the necessary equipment for the college section which included a charging desk, a card catalog and additional shelving. Trying to arrange the space for the Sacred Heart collection and the equipment was a difficult task as the library was housed in what was still the girls' section of Notre Dame High School and space was limited.

During the summer the orders from American publishers arrived and they were housed temporarily. Mr. Ready was in Europe during that time and began purchasing in English bookshops. He bought many literary and historical works, but perhaps the outstanding collection which he purchased was the personal library of a former Catholic chaplain of Cambridge. This collection included a great number of theological books and books of the early Church history. Mr. Ready made arrangements for all the books thus purchased to be shipped to the United States by freight. Upon his return from England and Wales, he had the task of preparing to receive the huge shipment of over 10,000 volumes. By this time Mr. Richard Matzek had arrived on campus and they completed the planning for arranging the new

collection. By september when the library was opened to the first class of Sacred Heart, the books purchased in America were shelved on open shelves and were arranged for the convenience of the college students. After the opening of school the collection arrived from England and was probably the largest single book shipment ever to arrive. The shelving which had been purchased was assembled and the section of the library was assigned to Sacred Heart. The collection appeared to be adequate for Freshmen, but planning immediately began for the expansion of the library in anticipation of the coming years.