

Centralizing the Scholasticate

You will recall that while I was in Washington I had been called upon to bring some 750 one-pound bags of coffee to the new Juniorate in Esopus. The Poughkeepsie Juniorate was already gone from Poughkeepsie, away from the firetrap that was the Provincial building. We had also started to send a number of the old and retired Brothers to Esopus as well. Eventually, we also started to use the Esopus property for our new cemetery as the one in Poughkeepsie was already filled to capacity. The last Brother to be buried in Poughkeepsie was Bro. George Byrne, one of our capable teachers brought here for the Scholasticate.

It was also around this time that it was decided to move the Novitiate to our Tyngsboro property. This would further free the south end of the property for the future athletic programs and eventually the McCann Recreation Center. We were concentrating on having the Scholasticate alone on this property and we planned on naming it Marian College, a blending of the names Mary and Ann. The property had been known as St. Ann's™ Hermitage when we came here in 1904. We had wanted to call it Marist College but we found out that the Marist Fathers in Washington, D.C., were calling their seminary for student priests by the name Marist College. We could not then use that name. A few years later the Marist Fathers agreed to call their place Marist Seminary, and at that time we were able to revert to our original preference of Marist College.

We fixed up the Greystone building for our own needs with the library on the top floor, the physics lab on the middle floor, and the chemistry lab on the bottom floor. There was a Scholasticate building on the site where the present Greystone is situated, now the park between Greystone and the library. The then Scholasticate building was a study hall for the Brothers where the classes were held while the top floor was our tailor shop where the Marist cassocks were made, all the mending was done, and clothes were stored.

Our plans called for taking that building down to the cellar, which was all cement and was later made into the paint shop. We decided to put up a Scholasticate building, which would have two floors. The top floor would be a huge study hall where classes could be held, and the bottom floor would be our dining area and kitchen and supply room. We were still using the old St. Ann's™ Hermitage for our chapel services. Since the old building was scheduled to be burnt to the ground, it became imperative for us to also try to provide an adequate chapel.

The Holy Father proclaimed a special Marian Year to honor Mary and it would start on December 8, 1953, and last until December 8, 1954. This announcement made us decide to plan to have our new chapel ready for the end of the Marian Year. We chose the spot on top of the little hill with the idea of being highly visible from Route 9. Brother Abelus, our gardener, had a special vegetable and flower greenhouse off the then-called Waterworks Road, which separated the McPherson estate from the Bech property. We took down that greenhouse and resettled it on the south side of the remodeled Greystone building just outside the chemistry lab.

We first planned to have the new chapel as a circular building where the altar would be in dead center with pews all around. After much discussion, we decided in favor of Brother Nilus's™ more practical octagonal building with eight niches for the various statues we intended to display in the chapel. The Blessed Sacrament would be in a separate area for the tabernacle in the wall directly opposite the front entrance and also leading to the large Sacristy, which would jut beyond the chapel in an added area for Sacristy and storage as well as toilet facilities. It would be our jewel to honor Mary for the Jubilee Marian Year. The altar would be in dead center with a triple cross hanging from the center spot, with three crucifixes forming a triangle directly over the main altar.

Nilus had many architect friends who were glad to advise and guide us through this special "œgem" that we wanted to put up. We wanted it to be attractive and different. And it was. We decided to have the altar dead center with all the pews completely around the main altar. The special place for the Blessed Sacrament was in the deep wall separating the chapel and Sacristy. We decided to use a style just new in the market of putting up solid walls covered by some homemade thin bricks. They were much thinner than traditional bricks and could be colored or tinted in a variety of colors. Although they looked like bricks, they were thin slabs that would then be stuck to the cement. It was called Permastone. We also decided to have the central heating in pipes in the cement floor so that it would always be warm, but that was changed later because this sort of heating was not effective enough then, although new materials have now made it very effective. All the electrical work for the chapel was

done by two Chinese Scholastics who had escaped from China and were sent here for their Scholastic training. They were both experienced electricians.

All the columns were made of wood slabs glued together and were ordered from the West Coast. They came across the country from Oregon on a flat-bottom train and were delivered to the Dusso Chemical Company, which was kind enough to allow us to use its unloading platform. As we had no vehicles long enough to handle these columns, I sent over thirty Scholastics for each of the beams to be carried on their shoulders across Route 9 and onto our campus. It was a historical event, and all neighbors became much interested in this very different chapel being constructed. It was at this point in the work that we had gone to the city union to explain that we were doing this all ourselves with no outside contractors and only Marist Brothers were working on the buildings.

Parents and friends of the Brothers were invited to participate in the decoration and the needed furnishings. They could agree to purchase a pew, a statue, the kneelers, the holy water fonts, or any of the many decorations that we were planning to use. The whole chapel was a real gem, the jewel of the Marist campus, and it was indeed a work of love. When completed, the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament came here to take photographs and interview us. They dedicated an entire issue of their monthly publication to our new chapel, dedicated to Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

One item should be mentioned here. We had an old blind Brother who walked to the cemetery each evening with an old deaf Marist Brother. They would walk along the walkway to our cemetery where the McCann Center is now and greet everyone on their way, and then return to our Provincial House, which was where the Bank of New York is today. The blind Brother Justin told me that he wanted to contribute like all the other Brothers. I took out my list of chores that were still needed. He stopped me and said that he already knew what he wanted to give for the chapel. He wanted to provide the chimes to ring the hours, quarter hours and half-hours. As he was blind and could not see the time, it would be very useful for him in his work, for he did work daily at making the cords which each Marist Brother wore around his body to remind him of the three vows consecrating him to God. Thus our bells that we have now came from Bro. Eli Justin. To this day when I hear the chimes I think of Brother Justin.

The eight statues in the eight niches were St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Patrick, patron of the New York Cathedral, Blessed Champagnat, Founder of the Marist Brothers, St. Anne, Theresa of the Child Jesus, St. Joseph, and St. Francis Xavier. My sister, Rita, who has been blind for years, made the cassocks for all Marist Brothers and also ran a special vigil light club that would keep lights burning on each of the above statues daily. Those wanting vigil lights paid one dollar per statue for the whole month. She also ran a monthly raffle. The winner for the month would get a percentage of what was made, and the rest went to the missions. My sister is still very much attached to the Marist Brothers as her oldest son became one. My nephew has been a diabetic his entire life.

The chapel was completed in the fall of 1953 and the very first Mass offered on our altar in mid-October 1953. The chapel was blessed and dedicated when Cardinal Spellman came for that purpose on May 24, 1954. He was very pleased with the chapel and in the middle of the ceremony grabbed my arm and told me, "Brother Paul, I like what I see. This will be the Church of the future." And frankly this was nine years before the Council of 1962 when the regulations for the Church suggested that the priest should be facing the congregation. We had been avant-garde with the design of our chapel. And it has been considered a real jewel ever since. It was properly dedicated to Our Lady Seat of Wisdom and a proper patron for a college chapel.

We were ready now to receive more students and operate as an independent college. More Marist Brothers were getting their doctorates, and we managed to maintain a good number of Brothers on the staff as we grew. Some outstanding Marist Brothers did not teach but served the student body on the staff. I wish to underscore two of them here. Bro. Paul Stokes was a disciplinarian of the first order and had much to do in the initiation of the Red Fox as our mascot. Bro. John Malachy had a speech defect and was almost refused admission since it was feared that students might laugh at him in class. He was sent for treatment, and I accepted him as my private secretary. He later went on talking tours in various schools recruiting students for Marist College.

It is remarkable that we had our first graduation class with four Marist Brothers in 1946, and at the present time we manage to graduate close to 1,000 each year. With the start of the graduate school, and the special School for Adult Education, we serve and help many more individuals in addition to those from various high schools in the area and from many other states as well. With the permission to grant college degrees and later on to develop a graduate school, our Marist doors opened wider and wider not only to people of the area but to the many bordering states as well.

Continuing with our program of centralization of Marist College on our Poughkeepsie property, we started to plan for having the Scholastics completely lodged at the Scholasticate in the center of the entire property. The old Provincial House was no longer to be used and really had to be demolished. Before we could do that, however, we had to provide for adequate sleeping quarters for our Scholastics. Our faculty was housed in the extended St. Peter's building. I say extended for a two-story wood addition had been added to that building to lodge the faculty and also to provide space for the print shop where Brother Tarcisius would do the professional printing for all the college needs. We planned and received the permission needed to put up an extension to our new study hall and dining facility on the south end. This would be a simple three-story dormitory to provide sleeping quarters for our Scholastics. As soon as this building was available we were free and ready to burn down the old Provincial House, which had been the initial McPherson estate residence. Arrangements were made with the Fire Department to be in place and ready for action if the fire was not adequately contained. That beautiful and historic old house had served us well, and it had been a landmark of the area for years.

Our Scholastic candidates were now lodged in the new dormitory, which freed us to move completely away from the north end and concentrate in the center of both properties, which had become the St. Ann's Hermitage. The Provincial House and the Juniorate had now moved to our Esopus property, and the Novices had moved to the old Tyngsboro property.

Now the Scholasticate had the entire Poughkeepsie holdings consecrated to what was to eventually become Marist College. We were now concentrating on the college and had a lot of work to do yet to provide the adequate qualified staff with necessary doctorates, and providing the facilities for lay students to join us eventually. We were already working hard at providing the much-needed growth in faculty with proper doctorate qualifications. We would have to concentrate on this presently for this was capital to our growth and the present Marist College enrollment. We needed our Brothers to earn doctorates in the various areas that we would offer for our graduates to choose to specialize in.

Our success was all due to the hard work of the men who started the St. Ann's Hermitage in 1904 and all the years of growth to become the Marist Normal Training School in 1929 and later the expansion into the full four-year Marist College. These great men did what the Founder did all his life by working hard to provide for growth as well as to depend on God as if all depended on Him. I would like to end this section by simply naming Brothers whose memory brings back so many wonderful ideas to so many of us, all men who did as the Founder wanted his men to do: pray to God and work hard together. Hence our motto: Orare et Laborare.

Here are some great names of the past: Brothers Cecidius, Ptolomeus, Zipherini, Cephas, Abelus, Sanctus, Leo Hyacinth, Sanctus, Legontianus, Marie Petrus, Victor Hilary, Frederick Charles, Adolph Leon, Leo Camille, Emile Nestor, Edmond Alphonse, Paul Acyndinus, Eli Justin, Bonaventure, John Berchman, Paul Stratonic, Apologue, Arthur Xavier, Louis Viateur, Edmund Alphonse, Tarcisius, Henry Charles, John Berchmans, Frank Xavier, Linus William, Leo Sylvius, Michael Casey, Adrian August, Vincent Dominic, Mike Casey, Leo Camille, Arthur Xavier, Henry Charles, Gabriel Vincent, Victor Hilaire, Adolph Leon, Gregory, Kirk, Kieran Thomas, Paul Stokes, John Benedict, and Edmund Jude. I apologize for those whom I could not name here.