

Poughkeepsie, New York“June 1943

I completed my degree at C.U. and was very grateful for having the time to do that. Now, I knew, there would be work to do. The Provincial had been brief. I told him that the train for New York left at noon. His answer was clear, “Be on it!” It meant rushing to take that train to Penn Station, then getting to the Grand Central Station on time for a connecting train to Poughkeepsie.

On arrival in Poughkeepsie, the Provincial was still brief: “See me in the morning.” Fortunately, I was so very tired that any curiosity about my future job disappeared into thin air and I slept like a log. Tomorrow was another day. I would be rested, and I was sure that I could accept whatever was in store for me.

It was great to be back in Poughkeepsie again. I had enjoyed my formation years here, and now I was about to be assigned and become part of the operation. A new job, I guess, but I would leave all that to the Almighty and just make sure that I did my very best, for Prayer and Work was our motto. I knew that I had pledged to live by it. I was ready.

After Mass the next morning the Provincial told me that he would see me in his office after breakfast. When I got there, his opening words were, “Did you have a good rest?” When I assured him that I had had a tremendous rest and was all set now, he proceeded to tell me what he wanted me to do.

I was to go over to the Scholasticate community and stay with them for one week. I was to keep my eyes and ears opened, and at the end of that week the Master of Scholastics would be leaving for a good rest. The Provincial would then announce officially that since we had been a junior college 1929, it was just too much to ask the Brothers to complete their degrees on Saturdays and at night classes. He told me that he wanted and expected me to set up a fully approved four-year college to be authorized to grant bachelor’s degrees. Most of the Brothers would then be able to complete their work in three years and three summers, but could also take all the time they needed. He then asked me if I understood. I timidly said yes, but asserted that it would take a lot more doctorates than we have and a lot of money for salaries, etc. He told me to be reasonable and he would back me up 100 percent. “I know that you can do it. That’s it!”

His last phrase, “That’s it!,” came back to me often during the following years. It was God speaking to me and His orders were clear. He seemed sure that I could do it. I could not take any chances. I would cover all the bases, do my best and leave the rest to God. I kept repeating the phrase that preceded the “That’s it!” for he had also said, “Be reasonable and we will back you 100 percent.” I went to the chapel to confide my “That’s it!” into the hands of the Lord. At least to Him I could pour out my heart. He might never answer, I thought, but I was wrong. He always answered, for without His help I would never have succeeded.

It was great to be with a large community once again. There were six older Marist Brothers on the staff with some four or five adjuncts, mostly all old-timer Marists who had been on staff for years and would have a lot to offer. I spent the week enjoying the Scholasticate’s young Brothers, filled with energy and ready to do anything required of them.

Then I was there when the Provincial told the Scholastics that at the end of the week I would be taking over, and that they would be allowed four years to complete their degrees, if needed, before being assigned a task in the Province. He assured them that there would be a lot of work required of them, but with everyone pitching in we would manage. He gave me full authority to proceed with the decision of the Provincial Council. He stressed that we could succeed if only we followed the Champagnat blue prints for any success—the Orare et Laborare and plenty of both!

I spent all the time I could getting to know all the young Brothers and the staff, asking for their opinions and input to try to make them feel that this was a team assignment and that together we would succeed. I felt that I had a lot to learn, and that I needed to know the young Brothers better. We could then work on getting doctorates

on the staff and pursue the requirements to qualify as a four-year college. Besides building up the staff, we would have a lot of work also to put up the needed buildings.

Since we did not have a lot of funds, we would have to work something out ourselves. We needed to move out of the Provincial House and have our own place to lodge the Scholastics, to enlarge our present facilities, and to erect a chapel. Up to the present the young Brothers slept and ate at the Provincial House and had daily Mass there. We would have to provide all these facilities right here on mid-property as soon as possible, so that we would become independent and separate as a college community. My work was basically threefold: getting to know the young Brothers we were serving; providing adequate living quarters to be independent of the other houses on campus; and going about providing the needed doctorates on staff, proceeding to fill the requirements to measure up to a full four-year college.