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A CENTURY OF BROTHERHOOD:
STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AT
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY 1857-1955

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A Century of Brotherhood:
Student Development at
St. John's University 1857-1955

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Preface

It has been over four years now since I met Tom Voller. One afternoon, several high school classmates of mine and I trooped down to the cafeteria to meet with Tom, the St. John's/St. Ben's admissions counselor assigned to the southwest section of Minnesota. He introduced himself and proceeded to give us his pitch for the two schools. Tom was a friendly and engaging individual. As he was highlighting the benefits of a Benedictine liberal arts education, he often remarked that at St. John's or St. Ben's everyone else in the community makes students feel a part of that community. I liked that; I liked that they would care enough to get to know me, Christopher Welter.

It was more than the words themselves, however, that brought me to St. John's. At that initial meeting, Tom took time afterwards to talk to a couple of students he had not met before, including me. That meant something to me. It must have meant something to some of my classmates as well: out of a senior class numbering forty-four, seven of us came to St. John's or St. Ben's. And as for Tom, he addresses me by name whenever we pass one another on campus.

When I first arrived at St. John's, I heard that it was a place distinguished for its history, but I did not learn much in the way of particulars. The same may be said of SJU's belief in community and its commitment to educating the entire person. As a junior last spring, I articulated
in my thesis project proposal that I planned to document specifically how St. John's went about educating the whole person, both in and outside the classroom. The scope proved too broad, however, and I limited my focus to St. John's approach to student development. Although the classroom experience affects one's development, I chose to concentrate on the non-curricular opportunities available to students to foster personal growth (there are one or two references to the curriculum).

The project is fundamentally historical, both in scope and in method. I have sketched St. John's approach to student development over its first one hundred years, detailing what the University meant by "student development," how it effected that concept, and what reaction the students had to that concept. In so doing, I have substantiated my sketch with both primary and secondary sources. Because I intend the project to establish St. John's position on student development, not to determine whether St. John's was successful in that endeavor, I have relied heavily on historical sources. I do cite some sources that originate from the social sciences--including some of my own qualitative research--but only on a limited basis and whenever appropriate (most theories of student development began being postulated in the late 1930s and 1940s and would therefore prove anachronistic if included in this project).
My approach led to a two-fold obstacle: (1) most of the sources I used do not concern themselves with student development per se but are necessary to construct a history of student development at St. John's; and (2) the sociological sources expounding on student development generally originate after this project's time frame and do not necessarily take into account St. John's remarkable position—i.e., a Christian, Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts university. Consequently, I have had to combine common elements from each to construct my argument.

Objectivity was another difficulty. For my part, I have had to prevent myself from projecting my experiences as a St. John's student in the early 1990s onto the University's approach to student development from 1857 to 1955. The sources, too, must be viewed in a similar light. The Record, for example, was a student-run newspaper but had a faculty moderator (actually a censor for some time) throughout the duration of this historical sketch's scope. Having researched many issues of the Record, I believe the student staff both believed what it professed and felt comfortable in expressing its thoughts on matters. Therefore, I have referred to student testimonies and issues that seem as indicative of the student body's general outlook as possible under the circumstances, though of course not every student would agree with this general outlook. Moreover, I have complemented the Record with
other sources, including historical accounts of the Abbey and University (supposedly neutral), university course catalogs (the institution's point of view), and alumni interviews (personal experiences).

Authors of historical research must anticipate the question of relevance. I decline to draw explicit parallels or disparities between St. John's first century and St. John's of today. Such assertions are simply beyond the scope of this paper. However, I do find a personal relevance in this research precisely because I am a student at St. John's in the 1990s. As my senior year approached, I became interested in student development because it occurred to me that I was in the middle of it. Once my interest was piqued, I gave a lot of thought to my career here, reflecting on what it meant to be a St. John's student and articulating what advantages and drawbacks I perceived in the educational experience.

Having done the project, I see my personal growth in a new light. More importantly, I make connections between my growth and distinct themes St. John's postulated between 1857 and 1955. In particular, I am referring to the University's belief that students are complex persons who need to be addressed on several levels, not simply as seekers of knowledge. I also see parallels in St. John's emphasis on community both in the past and today--the deed follows the word. Finally, St. John's is proud of its past
and its tradition, often referring to it in admissions brochures. Learning about that past and tradition in more detail has helped me to appreciate my stay here and to clarify why I have found it to be a beneficial four years.

I had the opportunity to talk to numerous people—students, faculty, alumni, administrators, and friends of the University—while conducting my research. They often felt quite fondly of the University but nearly as often had difficulty explaining concretely why that was. I think one can begin to do so when one is aware of St. John's views on student development in the past. Accordingly, it is not only likely but also necessary that people such as Tom Voller refer to St. John's as uniquely traditional and truly welcoming.
Chapter I
1857-1920

This May my classmates and I will be the 137th class to be graduated from St. John's University. Much has changed over the years; much has remained the same. More than anything else, the University has treated its students with compassion and has taken upon itself the task of developing its students into thoughtful, caring, and principled men who are set to be guided by their Benedictine educational experience for a lifetime.

How St. John's chooses to accomplish this, however, has changed over time. Over the course of its first century, St. John's worked toward developing its students in primarily two ways. The first, covering the period from 1857 to 1920, emphasized external discipline. Students' college lives were scheduled tightly, monitored closely, and guided thoroughly by numerous rules and regulations. The second, spanning the years 1921 to 1955, shifted toward students internalizing their discipline and integrating the St. John's ethos into their own lives. By relaxing some of the rigid regulations yet not compromising its expectation of gentlemanly deportment, the University openly challenged its students to view their education not simply as four years of academic study but the continuation of their maturity into Christian men who have obligations to both
self and society.

Underlying these first ninety-eight years is the Benedictine trademark philosophy of *ora et labora* (worship and work). Students are expected to be involved in campus activities but should not allow their schoolwork to suffer for it. Balance is another stabilizer. The student addresses all areas of his life—the physical, the moral, the intellectual, the religious, and the vocational. The common thread between all places, periods, and people is the Benedictine *esprit de corps*. When students are admitted into the school, they are welcomed as members of the extended Benedictine family and treated accordingly. At St. John's, the core of student development resides in this belief in brotherhood.

Turning attention to the University's founding, one sees that student life immediately bore a striking resemblance to monastery life. The daily routine was predictable, little time was wasted on superfluity, and prayer to God marked the stages of the day. This mentality is certainly to be found among Benedictine monasteries, regardless of locale, but in St. John's case, the environment also lent itself to such a lifestyle.

The period from 1857 to 1920 may well be referred to as St. John's infancy and adolescence. And what a pioneering childhood it was. According to Father Colman Barry, in his definitive historical account of St. John's Abbey and
University \textit{Worship and Work}, when Prior Demetrius di Marogna and his four Benedictine traveling companions arrived at St. Paul via steamboat on 2 May 1856, the immigration rush to the Midwest was in full swing (27-28). In fact, Father Boniface Wimmer, abbot at St. Vincent's Archabbey in Pennsylvania, had sent the expedition in response to St. Paul Bishop Joseph Cretin's request for German priests to serve the ever growing number of German Catholics flocking to the Minnesota Territory (Barry 17). Minnesota had been under Territorial jurisdiction for seven years when the Benedictines first arrived and would not become a member of the Union for another two. In other words, the land Father Demetrius di Marogna and his cohorts encountered was still very much a wilderness in parts, especially in the Sauk River Valley\textsuperscript{1}. Hence, the monks thrived on a pioneering spirit which tamed a timeless natural environment with a highly ordered and disciplined livelihood. This pioneering spirit pervaded University life throughout its first few decades.

Soon after Father di Marogna and his cohorts arrived in St. Cloud, their thoughts quickly turned to establishing the first Catholic higher education institution in the Territory (47). In March 1857, the Territorial Legislature of

\textsuperscript{1} Settlers arrived into the region through Sauk Rapids and dispersed from there. St. Cloud, its neighboring hamlet, was not platted until 1854, Stearns County not until 1855 (Barry 34).
Minnesota approved the Charter of St. John's, agreeing that "It is highly important, that the youths of this new, but flourishing Territory, be not only instructed in the elementary sciences, but moreover, be also educated by sound, moral principles" (qtd. in Barry 488). The youths referred to were the offspring of German immigrants. According to Barry, more than fifty families populated the Sauk River Valley in central Minnesota by the time the Charter was approved. The Charter stipulated that the institution would be known as St. John's Seminary. "Seminary" as used in the Charter likely intended its more general definition, however, because the Charter explicitly stated that "no student shall be required to attend the religious worship of any particular denomination" (qtd. in Barry 489). Furthermore, because the term "Seminary" was unfamiliar to the public, St. John's was called a college when it opened 10 November 1857 (Hoffmann 3). By March 1869, the Trustees of St. John's Seminary were authorized to confer degrees and grant diplomas, and the Seminary itself officially became known as a University in February 1883.

When the school opened in November 1857, it sought out a particular kind of student and would continue to do so for the next century. The University held firm to its admissions policy--i.e., that the student prove of good moral character. Applicants for admission who had not attended college previously were required to "furnish a
character certificate from some responsible person [e.g., their local pastor]" if a faculty member could not vouch for the applicant's character; applicants who had previously attended college were required to validate their good standing with that school (1883-84 Catalog 21).^2

The selection of students with good character was only natural, considering the Order's main objectives when it arrived at the fringes of white European settlement. The original Benedictine immigrants established a higher education institution for the German immigrant youth, many of whom would subsequently enter the Order. This served the Abbey well because it ensured permanently the Order's missionary work in the Territory without having to rely on St. Vincent's Archabbey back in Pennsylvania (Hoffmann 4-5). Between 1854 and 1857, the Minnesota Territorial population multiplied by a factor of 5—from 32,000 people to an excess of 150,000 (Barry 28). German Catholics constituted a formidable portion of the influx and required spiritual guidance. Supplied with morally honorable, well disciplined students who often joined the Order after graduation, St. John's could thus alleviate this shortcoming. It was not long before the Order was realizing its objectives. In the 1868-69 academic year—the year after the Order settled at

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^2 Citations to the University catalogs give only the date and page number. All catalogs are listed in chronological order under the bibliographic entry "St. John's University Course Catalogs."
its present location--40 of the 84 enrolled students were preparing for the sacred ministry (Hoffmann 29). Ten years later, the ratio had decreased to 1 in 5 and to about 1 in 10 by the University's fiftieth anniversary, but the student body was increasing without necessarily losing sacred ministry students (57, 141).

When one compares the Order's Charter (which stresses moral guidance as well as a solid education) with the University's remarks on enrollment in the catalogs (which limits acceptance of students who prove of good moral character), it becomes apparent that St. John's early on took both a professional and personal stance towards its students. In essence, University administrators and professors supplanted the students' parents in an authoritarian role while the students resided at St. John's--the original student-development theory referred to as in loco parentis. Such character development--which persisted for the first three hundred years in American higher education and for the first sixty-five years at St. John's--promoted traditional Christian religious values with rigid rules and regulations enforced by rigorous discipline (Upcraft 41). Indeed, American colleges were more concerned initially with their students' character development and less with the students' intellectual development (41). St. John's, too, shared such concerns: "Character makes the man,
knowledge adorns him" (1893-94 Catalog 7). If one is to accept the University at its word, then not only did St. John's stress both intellectual acumen and moral astuteness but it actually favored the latter. The personal outweighed the professional.

In keeping with its intention to develop the student as a person, the University logically established itself as a residential college. In his overview of collegiate housing, Charles Frederiksen explains that up until the Civil War, American higher education was patterned explicitly on the English model (e.g., Oxford and Cambridge) (168). The trend began with Harvard's founding in 1636, thus making the residence unit the focal point for formal and informal education alike (168).

Aside from philosophical reasons, student residences also served a practical function. During colonial times, students tended to be quite young and traveled great distances to arrive at college. Therefore, parents were in favor of living arrangements that provided disciplinary supervision (Frederiksen 168). Parents' wishes, coupled with the insufficient housing provided by the small communities in which the colleges were located, led to

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3 St. John's went so far as to publish a student guide to outline explicitly how students were to act. Called College Life: A Manual for Students, it was printed in 1898. The guide was as exhaustive as it was particular; the topics range from studies to personal qualities, from good behavior to the Christian student, and from table etiquette to proper reading material.
residential colleges, which in their turn led to the *in loco parentis* approach (168).

St. John's faculty, like many early American college faculty, not only taught their students but also supervised, ate with, and resided with them—often within the confines of one building. The original 1857 log building, consisting of two adjacent structures, measured 26x20 feet and housed the kitchen and studio, as well as three small rooms—one each for the prior, the professor, and an occasional guest ("Chapter" 62). This intimate living arrangement between teacher and students remained unchanged throughout the first sixty-four years⁴. Moreover, it was crucial that the University practiced what it preached. As a proponent of community, St. John's did well to live its philosophy. Indeed, its efforts at promoting student development would be far less remarkable had it not done so. Even up to contemporary times, students, alumni, and friends of the University regularly point to St. John's focus on community. From the very beginning, St. John's believed in cooperation and mutual support. Nowhere is this brotherhood more apparent than in residence life—where tutor and pupil lived under the same roof.

The *in loco parentis* mentality pervaded the students' daily routine at "Old St. John's." Their day began at 5am.

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⁴ Monks and students occupied different quarters within the same building up until 1921, and until 1926, all faculty members were from the monastery.
and was scheduled tightly until 8:30 in the evening. Between recreation, meals, classes, and study time, students were actively occupied until evening prayers. "After night prayers," remarks one of the five original students, "silence reigned supreme, no talking whatever was allowed" ("Chapter" 62).

Aside from the daily routine, a Johnny's life was an exercise in discipline and in following orders. Silence was to be observed at all times (excepting recreation periods), and students were not allowed to leave University grounds without permission (Christmas vacation was the only occasion students were allowed to leave campus during the ten-month school year). When on campus, students were under constant supervision whether in class, study hall, or church or at play outside (1893-94 Catalog 5). Furthermore, the University considered it its prerogative to inspect all incoming and outgoing mail, as well as to confiscate literature and pictures "of questionable morality" (5).

Though there is no specific mention of it in the catalogs, student life was in many regards a monastic one. For example, among the rules of discipline outlined in the 1886-87 Catalog, students were strictly prohibited from entering "private rooms [i.e., other students' rooms]" or

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5 Mail was of particular importance to University officials: with the advent of day scholars by century's end, they were "strictly forbidden, under pain of instantaneous dismissal, to take in or out mail" for resident students without the University's permission (1899-1900 Catalog 14).
study halls other than their own (95). There is also evidence to suggest that certain classes of students were not allowed to associate with other classes⁶, though Father Colman Barry recounts that students preparing for the priesthood and lay students were not exclusively isolated from one another. In fact, "a wholesome family association was generated" between them, forming the basis of a truly "collegiate community" (Barry 113).

Apparently, it took the students several weeks to adjust to this highly structured schedule. One of the four original students recalls that initial academic year: ". . . it took time to break us in. However some three months did the work; we were tamed and felt at home in our 'Alma Mater'" (qtd. in "Chapter" 62). However, once the students adjusted, continues the author, they understood that complying with the rules and regulations "would elevate and ennable our lives" (62). In fact, he goes so far as to say that "Such regularity and punctuality inspired us with love and awe" (62).

Because most students were obedient, if not virtuous, all were held accountable by the same guidelines, whether enrolled in the Preparatory Department, the Classical or Scientific Courses, the Industrial School, or the Commercial Course. St. John's well articulated and numerous rules of

⁶ According to the 1899-1900 Catalog, post-secondary students were prohibited from talking to both secondary students and Seminarians (15).
discipline exacted conformity, but such was not the main point; rather, the University ultimately saw its objective as the improvement of these young men in an explicitly Christian environment. St. John's implemented such thorough disciplinary measures "for the observance of order" but "intended that these [rules and regulations] be enforced by moral and religious suasion rather than by severer methods" (1886-87 Catalog 4). Accordingly, those students who abided by the St. John's ethos were recognized and affirmed (students scoring 75% or better on exams were listed monthly in the Record); those who did not were also duly noted, though not in as admirable a light (bulletins detailing a student's conduct and progress were issued regularly to parents and guardians).

Dutiful St. John's students exemplified "Good order, courtesy, manly and [C]hristian deportment, punctuality and attentiveness" as well as "pure and edifying conversation . . . due respect and obedience towards their superiors, and [C]hristian charity and politeness towards each other" (1886-87 Catalog 4, 5). To promote academic excellence, St. John's began issuing awards, or premiums, in the various classes on commencement day, 1870. By 1887, the premiums included the categories Good Conduct, Neatness, Politeness, and Punctuality (1887-88 Catalog 37-39). In fact, St. John's thought rather highly of conduct: "a few years would be spent to advantage at the University if nothing else were
learned, but to converse and deport oneself with the dignity and propriety of a Christian gentleman" (1886-87 Catalog 5).

A Christian gentleman--it was the University's ultimate goal. The concept conjoined the two elements with which St. John's intended to imbue its students, namely, a thorough education balanced by a sound spiritual well-being. Given the source (a Catholic liberal arts university's course catalog), an implicit allusion is made to the works of John Henry Newman. In his The Idea of a University: Defined and Illustrated, Cardinal Newman popularized the phrase "the gentleman" in an explicitly religious and higher educational context. "Liberal Education," he remarks, "makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman" (107). In defense of Catholic higher learning institutions, Cardinal Newman drew a fine distinction between secular and denominational liberal arts educations. He advocated the highest quality education and its "connatural qualities" but warned that "a large knowledge" is not enough; in short, a liberal education does not "guarantee . . . sanctity or even . . . conscientiousness" (107).

His distinction is a crucial one, he says, because education is not sufficient on its own accord; anyone can be educated. A Catholic education must go deeper than that: whereas "The world is content with setting right the surface of things, the Church aims at regenerating the very depths of the heart" (180). St. John's, then, intended to impart
more than knowledge, namely, how best to use this knowledge to one's advantage in light of his Christian heritage.

By 1880 the University attracted mostly students who were seeking a sound liberal education. This is due in great part to the vast numbers of immigrants making their way west from the 1850s to the 1910s. Often these immigrant students required instruction at a basic level, including the rudiments of English language and American customs (Barry 283). The main course of studies, the Classical Course, was originally a five-year program consisting of Christian doctrine, Latin, Greek, English, German, French, geometry, algebra, arithmetic, book-keeping, history, penmanship, drawing, and music (Hoffmann 20). The second option for undergraduates was the Scientific Course, added in 1873, which varied little from the Classical--natural science was substituted for Latin and Greek--until 1899 when more modern facilities allowed it to stand apart from the Classical (45, 121). For those who did not care to pursue as rigorous a course of studies, there was the Commercial Course, begun in 1877. Its content and style modeled

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7 Hoffmann reports that nearly half of the enrolled students in 1868-69 were preparing for the sacred ministry, presumably including students who were currently completing the classical course but planning further ecclesiastical study (29). By 1880-81 there were 25 enrolled in the ecclesiastical course and 133 in the classical/commercial courses--an increase of 12 and 51, respectively, since 1870 (1880-81 Catalog 34-37).

8 A commercial course had been listed in the catalogs since 1870, but the Commercial College, which St. John's
contemporary "prominent business colleges" and trained one to become an accountant (55).

These early decades at St. John's are noteworthy because the methods used in developing the students were firm and not questioned at length until Father Virgil's term as dean of men in the 1930s. Moreover, the University often assumed an active role in its students' growth without encouraging its students to do likewise. Pedagogically, information was imparted to the students through lectures, and it was the students' responsibility to take notes ("Chapter" 62). These lectures were followed up by oral examinations at the conclusion of each term, with the president and all faculty members in attendance ("Local" 7). Afterwards, results for each class were read aloud to students and faculty (1883-84 Catalog 21). This set way of exacting a certain response can be seen in the University's approach to deportment as well. Monthly bulletins recounting punctuality, conduct, neatness, and politeness were also read publicly (1893-94 Catalog 7-8). Students were put on public display, in a manner of speaking, and therefore may have acted properly simply to avoid an uncomfortable scene at the conclusion of each month. The University was acting at all times with the student's well-being in mind, but the method would be re-examined after the
World War I.

At any rate, this teaching style reinforced the concept that process was as vital to education as was content, and this methodology resurfaced in student organizations. Of the seven undergraduate literary associations in existence at some time between 1868 and 1920, each one honed debating skills or elucidated parliamentary law. Much like the University, the associations were procedure-oriented and enjoyed relative popularity among the students. In 1919, for example, the St. Bede's and Excelsior Literary Societies benefited from burgeoning membership. The former tripled in size, purportedly because formal debates would be held every third Sunday (as opposed to every fourth) and would adhere strictly to rules of parliamentary procedure; the latter recorded its greatest affiliation to date, again due to emphasis on parliamentary rules ("Societies" 493).

Complementing the intellectual growth fostered by the undergraduate education, St. John's maintained an atmosphere that promoted spiritual cultivation as well. When the Order was forced to make its move from St. Cloud out into the Indianbush, Father Bruno Riess, the monk primarily responsible for the University's present location on the shores of Lake Sagatagan, selected the spot with particular interest and care. Father Colman Barry remarks that such natural surroundings as St. John's enjoys "could not but elevate the mind and heart to God" (82). The monks intended
from the outset that St. John's would both present and procure the beauty of a God-given life.

Although there is no denying the physical beauty at St. John's, spiritual enrichment manifested itself in more concrete ways as well. Foremost among them were religious activities. Morning prayers and mass opened every day of the week; nightly prayers concluded them. Such constancy marked the daily routine from the classes of 1857 to 1920. Sundays were further punctuated by Vespers in the midafternoon and Christian doctrine classes (i.e., catechism) in the early evening. The non-Catholic students are of particular note. St. John's considered itself "unsectarian [as its Charter had established], in the sense, that students of all denominations are admitted and no one's religious views are interfered with" (1886-87 Catalog 4). However, the University required non-Catholic students to be present at the common exercises of public worship to ensure right order but exempted them from the Christian doctrine classes (1893-94 Catalog 5-6).

Because not all students were subject to formal indoctrination, the University introduced popular religious organizations "For the purpose of encouraging practical piety" (1898-99 Catalog 33). The presence of these groups was commonplace at higher education institutions. Of the twenty-two schools established in the Thirteen Colonies, sixteen maintained voluntary religious associations.
Forerunners to organized religion on campus, these associations "were highly moralistic in their purposes, concentrating on study of Scriptures, prayer, and the relationship between faith and the academic experiences of the membership" (Butler 4). St. John's organizations, too—with their practical piety—had a similar objective.

Among the longest lasting organizations, and the first of a religious character, The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in 1870 and sought to venerate the Mother of Jesus. Activities included daily devotional services and public recitations of the Rosary and the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception (Hoffmann 143). The Sodality also provided its members with a circulating library—a frequent service of many early organizations—stocked with "reliable Catholic authors," "preserving young students from the pernicious influence of bad literature" (144).

Other religious organizations included the St. Benedict's Altar Boys' Association (a.k.a. the St. John Berchmans' Sanctuary Society after 1897). Its purpose was simple—to instill servers with "modesty and religious decorum" (1897 Catalog 29). Devotional organizations were the norm throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and included a local center of the League of the Sacred Heart, Apostleship of Prayer (1896), its ancillary the Society of the Promoters of the League of the Sacred Heart (1902), the Archconfraternity of Perpetual Adoration
(1910), and the Holy Name Society (1916).

About the same time that student organizations were being formed, the University made its first mention of students' physical development. More pressing issues, like the construction of buildings and the initiation of a curriculum, naturally took precedence when the Order first arrived in 1857. But as the newly founded Abbey settled into its rhythm, it began to look at ways it could complement its highly religious, educational approach to student development. The students' physical activity was one such way. The first reference to recreation came in the 1870 Catalog: "It is almost superfluous to add that the play-grounds are more than ample enough to afford the students every legitimate recreation" (4). In other words, it was the student's responsibility to avail himself of his environment; the University did not require physical education as part of its curriculum.

Apparently, the University understood its students well when it came to outdoor activity. Christian gentlemen during class, study hall, and church, boys will nevertheless be boys during recreation. In a letter to the Record dated 5 February 1889, C.J. Williams, class of 1868, narrates his excursion into the woods during free time one day:

Things were primitive in those days at that temple of learning. I remember this because on the morning after my
arrival I heard of an Indian encampment along the lake-shore, some half mile distant from the college and being of an investigating turn of mind, resolved to visit it forthwith, which I did. On my return I was informed that I had been out of "bounds." In the guilelessness of my childish nature, I asked where the line ran. As it was as imaginary as a parallel of longitude and much harder to find, and as it was easier for the authorities to forgive me than to answer my question I was excused. (22)

There were other activities—organized sports, in fact—besides the occasional jaunt through the woods. Williams tells of baseball grounds and spear-fishing sojourns (22). By the early 1890s boat clubs offered a counter-option to those not inclined toward baseball (1891-92 Catalog 29). But St. John's did not take control of its students' physical well-being fully until 1905. With the establishment of the Department of Physical Culture and Athletics, a course in physical education was added to the University's curriculum. The University deemed "physical training . . . an essential element in the education of young men" and therefore required all Theological, Commercial, and Junior Hall students, as well as half of the
Senior Hall students, to attend gymnasium classes twice weekly (1905-06 Catalog 51).

St. John's established the Department for two reasons: (1) to procure the inherent benefits of physical exercise—i.e., "to promote health and vigor, to correct defects of posture and carriage and secure a harmonious development of the body, to bring the body under control of the will and aid in the attainment of skill, precision and grace of movement," and (2) to utilize organized physical education as an adjunct to its development of the Christian gentleman (51). Johnnies honed their physical dexterity by exercising in various gymnasium activities coupled with military drill (51-52).

More importantly, Johnnies assumed positions of responsibility for themselves and each other. Students "who show most proficiency and conscientious work in gymnastics," for example, "with an aptitude for commanding and instructing" were designated leaders and assisted the physical director throughout the school year (1905-06 Catalog 52). Likewise, those who excelled in military drill became officers and aided in training military companies. Although the responsibility involved was nominal, it was significant that students began to supervise one another collectively rather than accounting for their actions individually. This is the first mention of student
leadership given in the catalogs.  

To what extent, however, the University intended physical education to help foster the students' character is dubious. On the one hand, the University advised its students to practice self-control: "Proper exercise will train the muscles to obey promptly the dictates of the will. This is important, as . . . the muscles are the only organs under the control of the will" (1907-08 Catalog 52). On the other hand, the University postulated unequivocally that physical exercise "will also develop invaluable moral and mental qualities as nothing else will" but did not go on to state how or why that was so (52).  

St. John's was quite clear, though, on the role of athletics in the overall college experience. It provided "amusement, recreation and healthful development of each and every student" (1909-10 Catalog 52). To ensure that athletics did not gain undue importance, University faculty summarily prohibited intercollegiate athletics in 1909, reasoning that competitive athletics between schools was "not only a drawback to the realization of this purpose [i.e., the students' healthful development], but a possible source of much annoyance, immoderate rivalry, and distraction from the more serious duties of college life" (1909-10 Catalog 52). A year later St. John's teams were

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9 According to Father Alexius Hoffmann, advanced-course students occasionally acted as assistant disciplinarians for study halls as early as 1875 (51).
allowed to compete on a limited basis with some nearby schools\textsuperscript{10}.

The University's approach to regional athletic competition evidenced its commitment to its mission—the complete development of the student. For the first twenty years young men were left to their own ingenuity for physical recreation, a task that required little effort, what with the campus bordering a three hundred-sixty acre lake and enveloped by woodlands. As enrollment increased, intramural sports became commonplace. Finally, in 1905, the administration took full advantage of the benefits physical well-being could provide students. Aside from improving the students' health, gymnasium classes and organized athletics taught Johnnies equally beneficial lessons, like self-control, respect for one's opponents, and responsibility for supervising others. In like fashion, instructors underscored the benefit of a sound body while concurrently deemphasizing the perceived need to win at all costs.

\textsuperscript{10} Though participation in varsity sports was limited, St. John's boasted of lively intramural contests which sated students' competitive spirits. But the prohibition on intercollegiate sports remained relatively intact until the spring of 1920, when St. John's joined six other schools to form the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC). The MIAC intended to prevent sports from becoming overemphasized at its member schools; "to foster at its highest the spirit of intercollegiate friendliness, which is so important a factor in giving athletic rivalry its proper educational value; and to bring to a high level and standardize the rules of amateur and scholastic eligibility" (1920-21 Catalog 87).
Chapter II
1921-1955

The epoch from 1921 to 1955 is marked by a lessening of
the in loco parentis approach while students are given more
opportunities to promote growth in various aspects of their
lives. While guidance is a constant companion to the Johnny
student, he is given the responsibility of embracing his own
autonomy and implementing his ideals into an integrated way
of life. Furthermore, this period also exemplifies the
University's gains in better understanding and articulating
its role in the educational process.

The year 1921 marked a significant transition at St.
John's Abbey and University. In the mid-nineteenth century,
Benedictines assumed the role of establishing and
maintaining Catholic life in central Minnesota; welcomed it,
in fact, with productive vigor. Sixty-five years' worth of
effort and sacrifice placed the St. John's Benedictine
community in a new and promising position—"on the threshold
of its maturity" (Barry 256). As Abbot Peter Engel's
administration drew to a close in 1921, the community sought
a successor who could guide it to that full maturity. After
a two-day deliberation, Prior Alcuin Deutsch was selected as
the fifth abbot. With that, St. John's moved into a new
epoch.
Abbot Alcuin's tenure has been summarized as one buoyed by "a strong spiritual undercurrent" (Barry 258). That being the case, he determined to implement a thorough "spiritual synthesis" at St. John's (258). Despite this transitional period, Abbot Alcuin's agenda reaffirmed St. John's preeminent objective--to provide a thorough education and moral guidance--which, in turn, provided a reassuring continuity. As before, the University diligently placed humankind's relationship to God at the forefront of its educational and moral mission.

In light of this, St. John's reiterated succinctly its objectives. Harkening back to the original Charter, the University offered a thorough liberal arts education comprising "a well-balanced development of will and intellect, of high religious and social ideals and the requisite knowledge to use these properly as guiding principles in life" (1921-22 Catalog 33). So integral was this balance between intellect, principled reasoning, and moral virtue that knowledge without character was deemed "sadly incomplete" at best (15), and ruinous to both self and society at worst (1920-21 Catalog 24).

Accordingly, much emphasis was placed on religious and moral training. Carryovers from the first sixty-three years included regular classes in Christian doctrine, instruction at Sunday sermons, and a religious base on which the
superstructure of general conduct and ethical code was erected (1921-22 Catalog 15). Additions by this time included an annual retreat required of all Catholic students¹ (15). In time, students would not only accept these retreats as part of their Christian liberal arts education but would grow to enjoy them as well. Many students both appreciated and awaited the annual retreat, viewing it as a welcome opportunity to ruminate on the natures of God and man, to distance themselves from the world’s affairs, and to reflect on their own moral lives of the past year. In fact, one student commented in 1941 that the annual retreat was “the most important part of the whole year” (“Student Opinion” 2).

Along with the religious instruction offered, faculty were to play a key role in character formation. Not only were they "superiors" who imparted information, but they also were "friends" who could be turned to "for guidance and inspiration" (1921-22 Catalog 15). Likewise, students who habitually ignored the rules of discipline or the moral code would not be tolerated because faculty aimed to form character, "not to reform misformed characters" (1921-22

¹ According to Father Colman Barry, spiritual retreats for laity were introduced at St. John’s in the summer of 1923 and initially met with tempered reactions, but in 1931 it became a regular event, instructing over 13,000 persons between 1931 and 1955 (260-61).
Catalog 15).

A St. John's faculty member's role takes on added significance within the broader historical context of the 1920s. For about a decade, beginning around 1910, institutions of higher education again preferred the English-based educational system. The German system, however, had left an indelible mark. The German system specialized in research in the respective disciplines, taking focus away from the students. Throughout many universities and colleges, a confluence of factors--student-faculty conflicts, student rebellions, specialization in disciplinary fields, and development of the research university--resulted in faculty losing interest in the residential housing experience in particular, in the development of the student in general (Frederiksen 174-75). The void created by the faculty's departure was filled by non-faculty persons, often including coaches and "housemothers," or older women (175). St. John's, on the other hand, avoided this role-reversal for the most part because it had placed prefects (who often doubled as professors during the day) among the resident students.

Placing faculty members among the students provided a unique opportunity to bridge lessons given in the classroom and in the dorm room. Too much should not, however, be made of this living arrangement. Prefects tended to stroll the
halls periodically, making sure no one was disturbing the peace. And although students often recall their prefects being amiable and willing to talk matters over with them, most prefects were not openly lecturing students on good behavior. Rather, as is customary of Benedictines, the prefects offered themselves as living examples of proper behavior.

By 1921, St. John's was firmly established and was coming into full maturity. Consequently, a certain stability had over time become inherent, and narrowly rigid disciplinary policies were being relaxed. This again is apparent in the 1921-22 Course Catalog: for example, letters between students and family members were no longer subject to censorship\(^2\) (19). The daily schedule, too, became more flexible under Abbot Alcuin Deutsch's reforms. The 5am-to-8:30pm day now simply consisted of classes from 8am to 12pm and 1 to 2:45pm (Barry 259). Living conditions also underwent alterations. With the opening of Benet Hall, students were finally offered individual rooms, provided they could afford the added fee privacy cost (1921-22 Catalog 14). Rather than being watched constantly, it was now expected that students would take it upon themselves to

\(^2\) Excepting air force cadets' during World War II, all student mail was inspected by dorm prefects until 1944 when Benet Hall students received private mail boxes ("Johnny Love" 3).
be faithful to their schoolwork. They were given the chance
to direct their lives more actively.

One way to incorporate Abbot Alcuin's spiritual
emphasis into the student life was via student
clubs/organizations. Between 1870 and 1920, they fostered a
devotion to God and family\(^3\). But by 1921 and after, a more
engaging and action-oriented time, these associations
encouraged a union between one's religious faith and secular
life. Foremost among the associations were the Oblates of
St. Benedict. In 1894, Archabbot Leander Schnerr of St.
Vincent initiated the Institute of the Oblates of St.
Benedict's revival in the United States. Beginning in 1925,
Abbot Alcuin and Prior Alfred Mayer did their part to foster
interest at St. John's (Barry 261). Their efforts met with
great enthusiasm. Abbot Alcuin received sixty Oblates on 21
March 1925, the Feast of St. Benedict. In the thirty years
that followed, 2400 Oblates affiliated themselves with the
Benedictine community at St. John's--including University
students and alumni\(^4\) (Barry 261). The organization--which

\(^3\) Of the seven devotional religious clubs existing before
1921, five still garnered enough involvement to be listed in
the 1930-31 Catalog, but only three were listed in 1939-40.

\(^4\) Although Father Colman does not differentiate between
undergraduate students and others, Johnnies did indeed
affiliate themselves with the Oblates. At the height of the
Catholic Revival, students joined by the dozens. Forty-two
students, for example, were invested as Novice Oblates on 11
November 1942 ("Chaplain" 1).
offered "the spiritual inspiration to lead a more perfect Christian life in the world according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict"—was so popular, in fact, that a director was eventually appointed, a monthly paper was issued for members, and a lending library of spiritual books was arranged (1939-40 Catalog 18; Barry 261).

Abbot Alcuin's administration, thus, witnessed a gradual move toward student autonomy as well as a renewed emphasis in the spiritual life. However, the University's primary focus remained its educational effort. The college department in particular emerged as the major educational development. The seminary, college, commercial, and high school departments consisted of some four hundred students in 1921 (282), about a quarter of whom were enrolled in college classes. The classical and liberal arts programs had been offered since 1857 to both lay and priesthood students, but the School of Theology, preparatory, and commercial departments consistently received more attention prior to the 1920s. The reason for this lies in the Church's educational needs at the time: the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked the flooding of American shores by droves of immigrants. The Catholics among them often encountered English-language and American-customs barriers. St. John's, like many other Catholic higher education institutions, responded by providing the
immigrants with a rudimentary education and the fundamental principles of business (the seminary ensured the monastery's self-propagation after 1868). After World War I, however, more and more Catholics were positioned to give their children a higher education (Barry 283). St. John's again responded accordingly.

Measures to begin strengthening the collegiate department faculty began in earnest under Abbot Peter's tutelage and continued into Abbot Alcuin's time. One of the first monks to return from his studies, Virgil Michel was destined not only to spearhead the liturgical movement locally but also to articulate the University's mission more cogently than had been done previously. Father Virgil returned to St. John's in 1918 to teach English literature.

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During the 1920s and 1930s, the University made a concerted effort to improve the college faculty from community resources. The effort, however, proved trying because there was no large endowment from which to draw and attract lay faculty. Therefore, in its dedication to providing education, Benedictine faculty often contributed their services for a minimal fee. Moreover, these fees were put back into the educational effort in the forms of scholarships and grants-in-aid. When questioned by a committee on education of the Minnesota State Legislature about the state's private liberal arts colleges in the 1930s, Abbot Alcuin responded thus: "I do not know what I should present for the consideration of the legislative committee regarding our institution except the great fact that for seventy-five years its presidents and faculty have labored without compensation, except lodgine, food and clothing for the education of the young men of this state, thousands of whom have received their education entirely gratis or at a minimum cost" (qtd. in Barry 284).
and the history of philosophy. Six years later, he was in Rome studying philosophy (Spaeth 2). Upon his second return in 1925, he began to infuse the campus with a heightened spirituality and to enhance the school's mission with an enlightened clarity.

Although most of Father Virgil's published writings do not focus specifically on education, he does profess his concept of a Christian liberal arts education in several articles (3). In his essay "A Religious Need of the Day," originally published in 1925, he makes the argument that humankind has been so bombarded by sensory input (due to proliferation of practical technology) that "pure mental speculations" and inner reflection do not appeal as readily to the younger minds (Michel 6). The educator who lectured while his students wrote was no longer sufficient. To accommodate the times, the educator and the teacher of religion must also intensify their approach: "The duty of a practical faith, therefore, and of the knowledge of the truths of faith--both must be emphasized more than ever" (Michel 8).

Father Virgil addresses other topics as well, topics that lie at the center of St. John's purview, namely, character formation. In the article "Are We Educating Moral Parasites?" he delineates the two most prevalent methods of developing character: (1) "selfish love of the patronizing
or the protecting parental instinct;" and (2) "the equally selfish tendency to follow the line of least resistance [i.e., discipline for its own sake]" (28). The former method is misguided because it prevents the young from enduring "moral hardships" which foster growth; the latter because imminent punishment "is the mainspring of obedience to the law," a punishment that may seem far removed later on (28). Father Virgil Michel draws attention to the teacher extolled for keeping good discipline or to the parent praised for "exacting obedience" as cases in point (28). (One cannot help but recall the premiums issued for good conduct and punctuality.)

A balance between these two extremes would be more beneficial, believed Virgil Michel, and that balance lay in a more comprehensive approach to the student. Ideally, education enables students to live a just, compassionate, and principled life because such a life is good and proper in and of itself, not because teachers or society at large demand that such a life be led (Michel 31). Thus, liberal arts graduates should not be automatons but "men [who] are exercised in the use of reason and will, [who] have become accustomed to controlling their other tendencies by their higher ideals and faculties" (30). Likewise, students should be taught—not forced—to obey (31). By teaching students principled thinking and moral reasoning, St. John's
is not graduating repositories of knowledge but vessels of Christian compassion. Obedience is accomplished by grounding it "in the supremest motives of obedience, primarily in the eternal relation of man to God" (31).

Six years after Father Virgil published that article, he was recalled from his convalescence at the Ojibway Indian missions of northern Minnesota to become dean of the college in 1933 (Spaeth 2). By 1935 the University published its most articulate and diverse mission statement. The tone was very much Father Virgil's. St. John's offered a liberal arts education as rich in cultural studies as it was immersed in a Catholic point of view. The three component parts consisted in the attainment of a liberal culture, the formation of Christian character, and a steadfast grounding in Catholic principles, both traditional and modern (1935-36 Catalog 48).

The first component, liberal culture, was described much as it always was--focussing on the natural sciences, mathematics, American and world literature, the social sciences, the arts, and philosophy. The second component, the formation of character, however, had not been put quite so lucidly before, though the sentiment does clearly originate from an earlier period in St. John's history. Following Cardinal Newman's lead, the University holds that intellectual attainment without the possession of high
social or religious ideals will prove ineffectual at best. Success lies in "the effective will" to incorporate one's knowledge with one's social and religious ideals (1935-36 Catalog 49). And the University must develop the students' sense of personal and social responsibility to effect that end. In other words, a St. John's graduate is obliged to assume a leadership role in the public life, both as a Christian and as a liberally educated human.

Again, intellectual acumen and social responsibility stemmed from and were sustained by Catholic principles, the third component in a St. John's education. As a highly educated Christian, it was one's responsibility to act as a lay apostle, "spreading everywhere the Way, the Truth, and the Life that is Christ" while combating the forces of extreme individualism or totalitarianism, naturalism and materialism (1935-36 Catalog 49). To be successful, however, the student must have "a firm sense of spiritual values" (49). Hence, Catholic students were expected to attend religion classes during their four years and to attend mass and Sacraments "as often as opportunity allows" (50). Moreover, students were expected to become actively involved in the Catholic Revival and the liturgical movement. For example, students were directed to join the efforts of Catholic Action in the diocese they resided within (50).
Thus, under the guidance and foresight of Father Virgil Michel, St. John's succinctly laid out its responsibility to and hopes for its enrolled students. Likewise, the students could discern plainly what their role in this educational affair was to be—a role they were expected to accept wholeheartedly and be faithful to for the following four years:

[A St. John's student's] attitude towards his studies and towards the other ideals held before him should be strictly by profession a student, one who is striving in every way, physically, morally, intellectually, religiously, to improve himself so that he may use his abilities more successfully later on in serving the cause of Christ and country through whatever vocational profession shall be his. (50)

Implicitly contrary to the students' role before 1921 (obey rules and follow procedure), the administration began to expect its students to internalize their education and integrate it into their personal and social point of view. Rather than limiting itself to the purely academic experience--the curriculum, the library, the classroom, and the laboratory--St. John's chose a holistic approach in educating its students, i.e., it welcomed them as people
first and students second. Coincidentally, students were reminded frequently to read through the Course Catalog prior to arriving at or returning to St. John's in the fall. Often this was followed up by a brief matriculation speech by either the president or the dean of the college, covering the Catalog's main points on discipline and expectations.

Father Virgil gave just such a speech on 11 September 1936. According to a student reporter, Father Virgil stressed the "necessity of religion in the student's life" and advised students to attend Holy Mass at least three times a week, daily if possible ("College Dean" 1). In a related note, students often encouraged one another to abide by the dean's expectations. In an article called "Mass Attendance: Opening of Complete Day," a Record correspondent

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6 St. John's philosophy stems in part from contemporary thought in the field of student development. For one, the influence of the German educational system—its primary purposes to teach and research—declined after the early 1900's and led to the re-emergence of the English-influenced educational system, which embraced student development more fully (Frederiksen 168). For another, student personnel administrators advocated holistic student development as it is here articulated in their 1937 Student Personnel Point of View: "This philosophy [i.e., that higher education is about learning in its fullest sense] imposes upon educational institutions the obligation to consider the student as a whole—his intellectual capacity and achievement, his emotional make up, his physical condition, his social relationships, his vocational aptitudes and skills, his moral and religious values, his economic resources, and his aesthetic appreciations. It puts emphasis, in brief, upon the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone" (qtd. in NASPA 49).
clarifies that attendance at mass at least three times a week "is not an attempt to force religion upon [the students]" but "is a suggestion implying the placing of first things first in the daily routine of life at St. John's" (2).

Working in unison, Abbot Alcuin's spiritual synthesis and Father Virgil's Christian character flourished on campus. Religious student organizations in particular continued to thrive under the liturgical movement and Catholic Revival of the late 1930s. First to materialize, in 1932, the Sanctuary Choir provided traditional church music at liturgical services.

And in 1935, by special request, a course in Catholic principles and backgrounds was initiated and opened to undergraduate seniors and graduates of Catholic and non-Catholic institutions (1935-36 Catalog 51). Aiming to master the finest Christian thought of the day, members engaged in general reading and open dialogues. Notably, the group educated one another via mutual cooperation and exchange, "the ideal pattern set down by Cardinal Newman for a true university" (52). The course, however, involved only a handful of students; only five to eight were accepted in its first year, 1936-37.

A third club appeared in 1936. Lay students gathered to form the League of the Divine Office, giving them the
opportunity to partake in the public prayer of the Church.

The fourth religious organization to begin in the 1930s was a local unit of Catholic Action, which was affiliated with the Catholic Action Conference of the Diocese of St. Cloud. The SJU unit sought “to provide a practical means for the students . . . to participate actively in one or more of the three leading diocesan confraternities” and the “good works” sponsored by them (1939-40 Catalog 19). The three confraternities were of Christian Doctrine, of the Blessed Eucharist, and of the Holy Ghost. The first intensified the study of religion both in and outside the classroom; the second, active participation in the liturgy of the Church; the third, self-denial, justice, and charity in the individual’s private and social life (1939-40 Catalog 19).

At this same time, a two-fold Benedictine spirit was stressed (50). The first was family fellowship. Reiterating much of what it stated in 1921, the faculty regarded students as fellow residents within the same household and treated them accordingly (35 of the 41 faculty members for the 1935-36 academic year were monks). Students were again encouraged to talk to teachers and mentors about social as well as educational problems. The second aspect was peace and tranquility. One way to keep the external world, with all its stimulants, from overly distracting a
person is to set aside places for peaceful inner reflection. The campus' natural surroundings assisted in that endeavor, as did occasions for prayer. On the whole, the Benedictine spirit encouraged "personal sacrifice" and "the attainment of social ideals" (50).

If the Record is indicative of the students' thoughts during the 1940s, then Johnnies truly endeavored to become Christian gentlemen who sacrificed and strove for social harmony. A student who attended a non-sectarian university wrote a letter to the Record staff, disheartened that his professor's teaching of "healthy skepticism," pragmatic relativism, and critical, empirical inquiry undermined his "balance," dissolved his faith, and eventually led him to withdraw from school (qtd. in "I Traded" 4). In response, the staff defends Catholic higher education's mission. They hold that the Catholic Church's part in the educational process is a positive, namely, that it addresses character as well as intellect. To wit:

The point [of Catholic higher education] is that Catholic college students have a firm belief in a triune God who is interested in man and has established a way of life for him, a trust in the permanence of that belief, and these young men are being trained to become leaders in a society that they will endeavor to keep democratic because
their belief in God includes a respect for individual rights in charity and justice. (6) This student echoes the general sentiments of the student body. Johnnies were time and again rooting for one another to strive for personal excellence and social harmony. Using the Record as their medium, Johnnies lambasted their peers' slothfulness ("Don't" 4), lamented their timidity at Sunday High Mass ("Lover" 2), educated them on Lent's meaning and significance ("Students" 2), and criticized them for vandalizing chapel pillars ("It's Eternal" 4), among other things. Of course, it is a revelation in itself that the students perceived that such encouragement needed to be offered.

Nonetheless, so alive was St. John's campus with the Catholic Revival and liturgical movement during the 1940s, there seemed no end to what tasks could be initiated—or renewed. Father Virgil Michel once stated that mystery plays or the passion plays marked the height of Christian civilization during the first centuries of faith because they "embodied" the "truths of faith corporately . . . beyond the confines of official church life" ("Religious" 8). Appropriately, these plays reappeared at St. John's while Father Virgil dedicated himself to the liturgical movement on campus. St. John's had put on Lenten morality plays before. The Johnny Players, St. John's dramatic club,
first performed Calderon's Spanish medieval moral drama The Great Theatre of the World in 1932 and again in 1933 but ceased for eight years afterward. Then in March 1941, after Rev. Clarus Graves, O.S.B., translated the script into English, the dramatic club busied itself in preparation for staging the drama that "spectacularly dramatized and personified" truths of Catholic theology ("Gliding" 1). Unfortunately, before the curtain went up, the snow came down. Inclement weather kept but a smattering of students from attending the performance. Consequently, hundreds of calls and letters came in from the outlying region, asking for a second performance ("Blizzard" 1). The dramatic club obliged and played to a packed auditorium, some audience members having traveled as far as 200 miles ("Thespians" 2).

The 1940-41 academic year marked the advent of other religious-minded endeavors as well. Beginning in November 1940, "Week with Christ" was a weekly bulletin put out by the Liturgical Commission of the National Federation of Catholic College Students, which was headquartered at St. John's by request of the National Catholic Welfare Council. The bulletin, written by faculty members of the religion department, explained the mass text of the upcoming Sunday and the liturgy of the current season. In July 1941 the Commission's accomplishments were reviewed in an issue of the Record:
Many tangible results were evidenced from the efforts of the [C]ommission the first year. An All-College Day was arranged by some students of St. John's and the College of St. Benedict. This college day was to be a get-together for ten delegates, chosen by the administration, from the seven Minnesota Catholic colleges to discuss "How I Can Be a Catholic in the Modern World," and "Liturgy and Life." Three such days were held throughout the year; at St. Benedict's in November, [at] St. Thomas, St. Paul, during March and at St. John's in May. ("Collegiate" 5)

Although the venture was relatively short-lived (publication ceased six years after it began), it did reach the students and was familiar to them. The Record conducted a survey among the student body, seeking their reaction to the weekly bulletin. Of the 379 students solicited, 34% considered themselves regular readers, 52% occasional readers, and 14% non-readers ("Record Quizzes" 1). Asked how they would improve the bulletin, students responded variously: (1) include a question-and-answer section on the mass; (2) use more objectivity and less emotionalism; (3) lessen the technicality and formality; and (4) quote Scripture less but concentrate more on personal questions brought up in the mass text (1).
The interest students showed in spiritual matters was impressive, but they took a serious interest in their intellectual growth as well. In fact, a letter to the editor in February 1941 prompted some rather thoughtful discussion on the matter. The issue centered around Mortimer J. Adler's book How to Read a Book. In a letter entitled "A Believer in the Practical," a Johnny student criticizes the University's welcome reception and use of Adler's book in classes, stating that it has "become the encyclopedia of a liberal education" ("Epistles" 4). The student questions this, summarily dismissing Adler as impractical and his book "superfluous" because it does not teach one applicable, practical skills (4). Hypothetically, he likens Adler's book to another, How to Play Bridge, saying that "reading seriously is for most people nothing more and most likely less than playing expert bridge" (4). He concludes by saying that teachers, writers, and others whose "state of life [demands] of them a liberal education" should read Adler's book (4). Otherwise, plumbers, accountants, engineers, and the like should read books specifically concerning their particular field--e.g., How to Obtain a Higher Wage.

The response was as voluminous as it was oppositional. One student defends the use of Adler's book because it teaches Johnnies "how to read a book in order that they may
read the great books in which are contained the treasury of human wisdom and intellectual (not only empiric) knowledge" ("Adler" 2). Furthermore, because SJU is not a trade school but a liberal arts school, Adler's book is deemed appropriate.

Another student writes to the Record, arguing that not only is "the right kind of reading" appropriate but also essential ("They" 6). It is important, he asserts, to maintain an equilibrium between sciences and the humanities in a liberal arts school--i.e., St. John's, which "does not pretend to be a technical workshop or a business college dedicated to perpetuate a certain economic philosophy" (6). The author further asserts that the "Believer in the Practical" is characteristic of his generation, a generation peopled with "job-conscious youth--ardent believers in the bourgeois virtues of security and material comforts," a generation that gives "little or no importance" to "Christian ethics" (6).

This student's well-articulated reply, along with many others, is both typical of the St. John's student body during the 1940s and a practical testament to the University's mission statements and philosophy. Students repeatedly recognize and appreciate their unique educational experience at St. John's--both while in school and years later. Be it educationally, socially, or in knowing and
loving God, one Johnny put it best when he graciously acknowledged the unyielding benefit "of liberal education upheld by a group of men bound together by the ties of religious fraternity" ("Benedictine" 2). The sentiment is both familiar and familial.

The keystone to the 1940s Johnny, however, is action, not sentiment—something not necessarily true of the preceding generations. The shift began in 1921 when the University held that its students would receive "the requisite knowledge to use [will, intellect, and high religious and social ideals] as guiding principles in life" (1921-22 Catalog 33). Of course, the prevalence of and concern for social justice runs deeper than a mission statement. To begin with, Pope Pius XI's encyclical Quadragesimo Anno (On the Reconstruction of the Social Order) issued in 1931, a vindication of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of the Working Classes) of 1891, called forth Catholics to restore social order. Addressing labor pilgrims in Rome in 1931, Pope Pius XI remarked that the spirit of both encyclicals could be expressed in three words: prayer, action, and sacrifice (Dichtel 3).

Other influences included Dorothy Day and Baroness Catherine de Hueck. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin began editing the Catholic Worker in May 1933. The Catholic
Worker Houses, which numbered thirty-four in the United States in 1941, provided food, shelter, and clothing for the destitute, mostly within larger cities (Mertens 2). Some Johnnies chose to involve themselves in the Catholic Worker's charitable efforts. For example, three students volunteered their Easter vacation at St. Benedict, the Minneapolis Catholic Worker House. Aware that "Discussion and exposition of Catholic theory on the social question is useless unless college men make practical application of the doctrine in their personal lives," these three students made sure that word and deed were one and the same ("Three" 4). "Once you get close to real tragedy," remarked the students upon their return, "you begin to see how very humorous and insignificant some of the seemingly important things are, and you begin to look for the little 'good' things" (6).

Like Dorothy Day, Baroness Catherine de Hueck, an exiled Russian noblewoman, ran a series of houses, called Friendship House, for the poor. She began her venture in Canada in 1931, and seven years later spread to the United States, in Harlem specifically. Like the Catholic Worker Houses, she fed and clothed the downtrodden while also educating the youth (Mertens 2).

The early 1940s, of course, were also punctuated by the war effort. Even the unassuming confines of St. John's felt the war's impact. Undergraduate enrollment increased on
average nearly 32 students per year between 1931 and 1939 but leveled off with the War's advent. By 1943, total undergraduate enrollment plummeted to 161—the lowest total since 1925-26 and a reduction by 62% from the previous year's total. Many of the extracurricular activities temporarily ceased with the mass exodus. Despite this, the importance of a broad-ranging Catholic education was still stressed. In 1942 St. John's initiated a curricular speedup to facilitate the commission of officers but advocated a four-year degree nonetheless. SJU reiterated that the institution provides an education for life; students, therefore, should "study intelligently" rather than sacrifice their education for "a war monomania" ("Induamur" 2).

Since 1921, St. John's encouraged its students to internalize the school's mission, to take it to heart and view the principles taught as an integrated way of life, not simply as a series of dictums they must endure for four years. The student clubs and organizations that formed during the 1930s and the issues covered by the Record in the 1940s indicate that, for the most part, students made the school's mission their own. Perhaps as an outgrowth of student involvement, however, some negative aspects also began to show up during the post-parietal era. Johnnies literally took their personal development into their own
hands in a rather peculiar fashion. As early as 1920, upperclassmen welcomed the freshmen to St. John’s with a series of initiation rites. Tradition held that all “the frosh” would take part in a ceremony within the first two or three weeks of school, inducting them into the student body. The ceremony, by nature a variety show, often included Shakespearean playlets, vocal contests, and other amusing antics.

The most notorious and consistent rites of passage included the issuing of green beanies and the running of the gauntlet, also known as the “paddling machine” (“Initiation” 1). Wielding inch-thick pine paddles carved by the freshmen, members of the Monogram Club (i.e., the lettermen's club) lined up in two opposing rows. Once the freshmen donned their beanies, they strode through the gauntlet, getting struck on the backside as they passed by. The ceremony concluded with a reading of the 12 Rules, a series of dictates freshmen must follow until the conclusion of homecoming week some four or five weeks afterwards.

Although much of this was done for amusement’s sake, some upperclassmen purported that such hazing stimulated growth in character and moulded integrity (“Freshmen” 2). One fellow student outlines the point with an ironic twist in language:

Hazing done in moderation is beneficial and
affords character training both to students and to the administrators. In this case a college freshman learns, perhaps forcibly, that he is not the fellow he was in high school. He finds that his future is up to him and that he must grovel at the bottom and labor sedulously for the top. This manner of sane hazing likewise can demonstrate to upperclassmen the virtue of acting moderately, no matter what the actions be concerned with.

(“Sane” 2)

This student concludes by cautioning his peers to use discretion and moderation during the freshman inaugural ceremonies. No good can come from "year-long antagonisms" or "rocking reactions" (2). Besides, their aim is to help new students adjust to college life, "to become enthusiastic members of St. John's Benedictine family life" (2).

Nevertheless, student opinions on the matter varied. In September 1940, the Record asked students what type of freshman initiation would be most suitable and why. A sophomore states that passing out the green beanie may be sufficient, feeling that "a return of last year's tonsure" is better cast into oblivion ("Opinion" 2). Another wants to take full advantage of these de facto servants, remarking that "A good hard three minute paddling should be punishment for those who do not obey every command" (2). A third more
tactfully answers that initiation should familiarize the freshmen with their new surroundings, convince them to adjust to these surroundings, and "make [them] realize the privilege of being admitted into our Johnny family" ("Opinion" 2). A fourth is both ambivalent and prophetic: "So long as freshmen endure it and upperclassmen enjoy it, initiation is almost indispensable. [But] Drastic measures, and undue brutality are entirely out of place" (2).

In spite of what some more vocal upperclassmen said, it is highly suspect that such display actually fostered growth within the students and certainly did not promote character as St. John’s defined it. Most alumni I consulted on this matter said it was something students endured for tradition’s sake—no more, no less7. Now that freshman hazing no longer occurs at St. John’s, it appears to have been an ill-conceived and misguided attempt by students to involve themselves in their own development.

By fall 1945, enrollment numbers were back to pre-war levels and by 1946 nearly double those, standing at 823 undergraduates, 494 of whom were freshmen. The rapid increase in student enrollment, though, did not affect

7 Reminiscing on his own freshman days, Jon Hassler, class of 1955 and current writer-in-residence at St. John’s, published the short story “Confessions of a Flunky” in 1983. Not only does he consider his hazing detrimental to his time spent at St. John’s, but actually calls the experience "Psychic rape" (33).
college life detrimentally. Ed Theisen, an alumnus from the class of 1952 and a current St. John's Board of Regents member, said the post-war years were business as usual. Commenting on the prevalence of former servicemen, Theisen recalled that as a freshman in accounting, he was flanked on the right by a man with no arms, on the left by a man who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Servicemen such as these two tended to be self-disciplined and internally motivated--most strove to finish in three or three and a half years--though they would not necessarily comply with rules they judged immature or meaningless. For example, Theisen recalled that most students stayed in on Saturday nights to be alert for church service the following morning; G.I.'s apparently felt no compunction for not doing so. Nor did they care to partake in freshman initiation. On the whole, concluded Theisen, students governed themselves.

From the students' perspective, the Benedictine way of life was a real presence among the students, as influential in the 1950s as it was the previous thirty years. Bill Sexton, class of 1955, recalled that there was a sincere comradeship among the students, especially among floor mates, and in Bill's case, among the student-athletes. He said that "if something bad happens to someone, everyone hurts." Ed Theisen, also commenting on the tight-knit
friendships, characterized them as friendships for life\(^8\).
Jon Hassler, another graduate of 1955, was influenced more by the Benedictine trademark *ora et labora*, remarking in hindsight that he appreciated the monks’ constancy and daily routine. In particular, he attributes his ability to order his time nowadays in great part to his stay at St. John’s, which even in the 1950s saw fit for everything to have its designated time and place\(^9\).

When I asked specifically about whether certain monks had an influence on the three of them, each one recalled certain professors or prefects without hesitation. Ed Theisen thought of Father Emeric Lawrence teaching moral values both in class and in study hall. Jon Hassler fondly named his last three prefects, Fathers Casper, Alfred

\(^8\) Throughout the first century, alumni remained faithful to one another. Alumni reunions would be attended by the hundreds, chapters of the Alumni Association could be found in the remotest regions of the lower forty-eight states, and alumni themselves would often write into the *Record*, detailing their lives and asking how others were doing. Letter correspondence during the two world wars was staggering. The *Record* devoted pages to the alumni every issue (which was put out weekly at the time) yet barely touched the mail received. The SJU experience truly bonded students for life.

\(^9\) Although St. John’s pushed for self-discipline and student initiative since 1921, daily life was still ordered: students were awakened at 6:30am by a prefect’s knock on the door, attended mass a half hour later and classes afterward. Meals too were set; students even sat with the same group of men. And by 10:30pm lights were to be out—though Jon reveals that numerable kerosene lamps illuminated late night study beyond the midnight hour.
Deutsch, and Adelard (though he paints his freshman prefect Father Henry as unapproachable). Finally, Bill Sexton answered that he was partial to Fathers Colman Barry, Vincent Tegeder, Alfred Deutsch, and Virgil O’Neill. Even today, Bill continues to seek out others whenever he returns to campus.

Father Virgil O’Neill is noteworthy because he was chaplain during the 1950s. Certainly one of the reasons students found him so endearing was his delightful wit and persistent encouragement, both of which were displayed abundantly in his Chaplain’s Letters. He affirmed students’ compassion: “The college men are to be praised for the marvelous spirit of charity they exhibited in keeping the all-night vigil May 16-17 [1951] for Abbot Alcuin (19 May 1951). He admonished them to keep the faith:

College men are people who are putting on (or should be) maturity, manhood, and responsibility. Truly mature men do not leave the spiritual element out of the solution of such problems as youth delinquency. The world--men in general--will only get better when you and I as individuals make more assiduous use of the GRACES OF THE SACRAMENTS. (17 October 1952)

He pushed them to be gentlemen: “You show your respect for others by saying ‘thank you’ and ‘please.’ Try to be a kind
person; it is a very God-like virtue or quality. . . . ‘A
GENTLEMAN IS ONE WHO NEVER GIVES OFFENSE’ (Cardinal Newman).
Let’s all try to measure up to this standard’ (29 April
1955).

Father Virgil truly believed in St. John’s educational
mission and therefore did his part to see it come to
fruition, all the while making sure Johnnies were giving it
every bit the effort he was. It is no wonder alumni like
Bill Sexton affectionately think back on the likes of Father
Virgil O’Neill.

Of course, alumni are often guilty of romanticizing the
past, but there is no denying that St. John’s still holds a
special place in their hearts. Bill Sexton is proud that he
and his classmates have made rather good lives for
themselves; he characterizes himself and other high-profile
alumni as average students while at St. John’s in the early
1950s. In fact, he noted that St. John’s has a particular
yet intangible quality of making average students excel. Ed
Theisen also commented on the general St. John’s experience.
He believes that the true measuring stick of any post-
secondary institution is whether a graduate would want his
children to receive the same education, something Bill and
Ed have replied affirmatively to seven times between the two
of them. Now, Ed looks forward to his grandchildren attending his alma mater.

Although Ed Theisen, Bill Sexton, and Jon Hassler should not be construed as archetypal Johnnies of the 1940s and 1950s, they do provide historical insights into student life at the time. Sexton and Hassler in particular are noteworthy because their remarks tie together some of the themes characteristic of the 1921-1955 epoch. Both testify that St. John’s sense of comradeship was both legitimate and pervasive. And Hassler grants that observing the monks pace their way steadily through a predictable daily pattern influenced him as well. He admired their constancy as a student and attempted to adopt a certain regularity in his life years later.

Personal accounts such as these—coupled with the institution’s emphasis on its students’ self-discipline and personal growth and the students’ own thoughts and actions—suggest a transition from the earlier, more firmly regulated epoch at St. John’s. This is not to suggest that the University abandoned all sense of decorum and the need for order to conduct operations. Rather, such measures to ensure external discipline no longer were the school’s primary concern. Men like Abbot Alcuin and Father Virgil

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10 Ed’s two daughters attended St. Ben’s while both Ed’s and Bill’s two sons attended St. John’s.
and efforts like the Catholic Revival and the liturgical movement brought to the fore the belief that Johnnies needed to internalize their educational experience and graduate from St. John's with a unified philosophy on what it meant to be a graduate of a Christian, Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts university. Of course, the SJU experience was always bolstered by the Benedictine belief that students are fellow members of the human race, of the Christian Church, and of the Abbey and University. It was a century of brotherhood.
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