

CISTERCIAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL

THE FIRST 50 YEARS

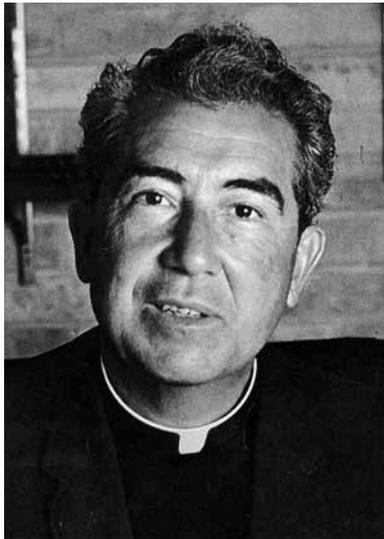
1962  2012

David E.
Stewart

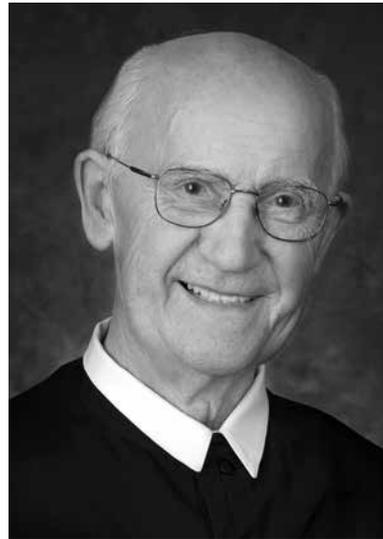


Headmasters
CISTERCIAN
PREPARATORY SCHOOL
1962 - 2012

Fr. Damian Szödényi, 1962 - 1969
Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, 1969 - 1974
Fr. Henry Marton 1974 - 1975
Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, 1975 - 1981
Fr. Bernard Marton, 1981 - 1996
Fr. Peter Verhalen '73, 1996 - 2012
Fr. Paul McCormick, 2012 -



Fr. Damian Szödényi
Headmaster, 1962 - 1969
(b. 1912, d. 1998)



Fr. Henry Marton
Headmaster, 1974 - 1975
(b. 1925, d. 2006)

Pictured on the cover (l-r):
Fr. Bernard Marton, Abbot Peter Verhalen '73,
Fr. Paul McCormick, and Abbot Emeritus Denis Farkasfalvy.

Cover photo by Jim Reisch

CISTERCIAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL

THE FIRST 50 YEARS

David E. Stewart '74

Thanks and acknowledgements

The heart of this book comes from over ten years
of stories published in *The Continuum*,
the alumni magazine for Cistercian Prep School.

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and many other monks, faculty members, staff, alumni, and parents
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of the magazine and this book.

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Chapter 8 and Brian Melton '71 contributed mightily to Chapter 11.

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were captured by or provided by Jane Bret and Fr. Melchior Chladek.

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and Bridgette Gimenez for their help in editing and proofing.

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— David E. Stewart '74

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by David E. Stewart, Yardstick Communications.
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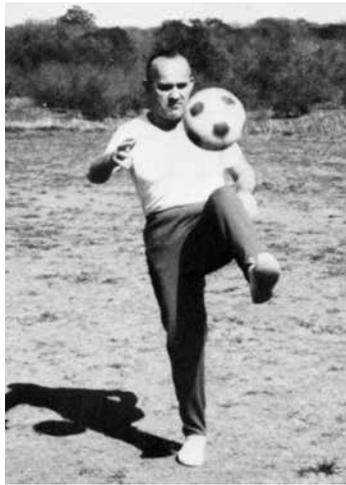
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“How ’bout a game?”

Fr. Matthew, thanks for many years of fun.

Dedicated to the monks of the Cistercian Abbey
and the faculty members of Cistercian Prep School
whose love and expertise have formed
so many boys over five decades.

Chapter 1

Opportunity knocks — 1960 - 1963

“We don’t have any place to send our boys before they reach high school,” Jane Bret complained to Fr. Louis Lékai after one of his history classes at the University of Dallas (UD) in late 1959.

Mrs. Bret, a Montessori teacher and mother of three boys, was working to complete her degree at UD. Fr. Louis was playing a key role at UD; he was also one of the primary reasons that Hungarian Cistercians had landed in Texas and Irving.

“We need a school like Ursuline for boys,” she explained. (Note: Ursuline Academy served grades K-12 in those days.)

The parochial schools overflowed with children, sometimes 75 to 80 students filling a class. The private schools weren’t much better. Two other moms, Pat Healy and Beth Smith shared her concerns. All three had a number of sons for

whom they were seeking a top-notch education.

“These three ladies didn’t like what they saw in the private and parochial schools,” remembered Bryan F. Smith. “They soon convinced their respective spouses that the education of their sons was in serious trouble.” A Harvard graduate with five sons and two daughters, Smith enthusiastically jumped aboard the small bandwagon that still had little direction.

A feature story in the January 1960 edition of the Catholic magazine, *Jubilee*, changed that.

The story trumpeted the exploits of a new school in St. Louis. The Priory School had been founded in 1955 by parents who recruited Oxford-educated Benedictine monks to serve as the nucleus of their faculty.

The monks from the Ampleforth Abbey of York, England, had enjoyed tremendous success, sending a large percentage of the students in their first

graduating class of 1960 to the nation's top colleges. The magazine story, or word of it, slowly made the rounds. The Priory School paradigm appeared solid.

Mrs. Bret, who had studied under Fr. Damian as well as Fr. Louis at UD, recommended that the growing band of "zealots" (Bryan Smith's term) consider the Cistercian monks as an option.

Jane Bret's comments on the need for a Catholic boys school must have lifted the spirits of Fr. Louis. He quickly passed along the news to his longtime friend, Cistercian classmate and novice-mate, Fr. Anselm Nagy, the prior and superior of the Cistercian community in Irving.

Frs. Louis and Anselm had served as the scouts who explored America for a home where they could keep the flame of their Hungarian traditions burning (see Chapter 10). A preeminent history scholar (he wrote two definitive texts on the Cistercian Order) with wit, charm, and grace, Fr. Louis served as the community's lightning rod and passionate salesman. A meticulous and quiet numbers man, Fr. Anselm preferred to remain in the background, focused on moderating disputes and financing the operation.

A prep school had been in their plans all along. Secondary education, after all, had been the Cistercians' traditional vocation in Europe for centuries. But a prep school was envisioned only after the Cistercians had rooted themselves in the Dallas area, perhaps in the seventies.

Both worried that a prep school at this juncture would distract the Cistercians from the very purpose for which they had settled in Dallas — to teach at the University of Dallas. This community of highly educated monks took pride in their roles as college professors. They might not be inclined to give up well-behaved young adults for unruly adolescents.

On the other hand, they knew the University of Dallas could not guarantee employment for the Cistercians forever. A prep school operated by the Cistercian would put the monks in control of their own destiny.

Frs. Louis and Anselm also may have understood that Jane Bret represented more than just the concerns of a few families. Here was an opportunity that might not come knocking again for some time.

They accepted the challenge, believing that in the long-term, the monks (many of whom had struggled to find steady work between 1950 and 1955) needed the prep school as much as parents like Jane Bret needed the monks.

"Yes, indeed we'd like to form a school," Fr. Anselm told her. "We have been teaching secondary school students for centuries in Hungary. But we'll need more than moral support."

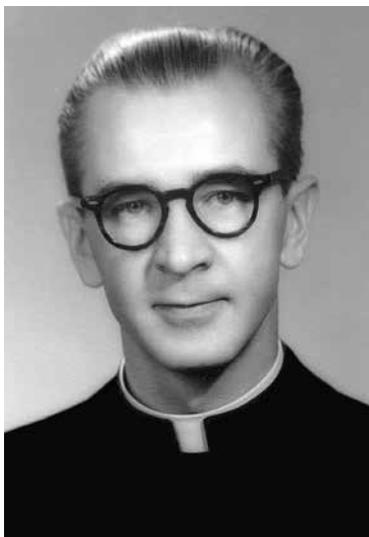
Mr. Smith, the chief financial officer for Texas Instruments, began to line up that support. He approached his good friend, Pat Haggerty, then president of Texas Instruments. Mr. Haggerty (who later would become the company's chairman) had a son the same age as Mr. Smith's oldest son.

"I could really get interested in this," said Haggerty.

Smith then asked Mrs. Bea Haggerty to help him enlist the support of Bishop Gorman for this new Catholic boys school. They found the bishop preoccupied with a variety of other projects, including the creation of two new diocesan high schools, Bishop Dunne and Bishop Lynch.

"Bea and I had to sit on the bishop's desk, literally," Smith laughed.

"We would not let the subject drop; we kept him on the case. He finally said, 'If you're going to do this school, go ahead.'" There was, however, a condition. The bishop prohibited fund-raising efforts for this



Fr. Anselm Nagy (above) and Fr. Louis Lékai were classmates at St. Emeric's, the Cistercian school in Budapest. Fr. Louis brought vision and passion to the monastery, while Fr. Anselm calmly maintained order as well as the books.

new boys' school from interfering with his other projects — in other words, no public campaign. Without advertising, the message would have to spread by word of mouth.

In the Spring of 1961, Dr. Mike Healy, Mr. Bill Bret, and Fr. Moses Nagy traveled to St. Louis to visit The Priory School. The trip fueled the group's enthusiasm and provided fodder for Fr. Moses' first and, as it turned out, last presentation on the new school.

The Smiths hosted a buffet in May 1961 for interested parents. Sixty attended and heard Fr. Moses tell of the challenges of the coming decade, including the increasing competition for spots at the nation's top colleges. He outlined a proposed curriculum that sounded quite different from American standards; it was the curriculum of the Cistercian schools in Hungary.

Prior Anselm, however, decided in June 1961 to appoint Fr. Damian, not Fr. Moses, as the school's first headmaster. The appointment surprised both men, and neither appeared amused by the decision.



Bryan Smith (in tuxedo) and wife Beth hosted a party in May 1961 to introduce Dallasites to the Cistercians and generate interest in their new Catholic school. Prior Anselm (left) and Fr. Moses represented the monks.

“I sensed that Fr. Damian really didn't want the job,” recalled Mr. Smith in his remarks at Fr. Damian's Rosary and Vigil Service in December 1998. “I soon discovered he had a reservoir of negotiating skills when he finally agreed to assume the task, but only if he would be free from the responsibility for fundraising and the school's finances; thus cleverly shifting back to the lay zealots the responsibility for those essential tasks.”

“Beginning in January of 1962, we were extremely busy,” recalled Fr. Melchior Chladek, who had been appointed by Prior Anselm in late 1961 to assist Fr. Damian in preparing the new school.

In addition to administering admission tests (and chauffeuring each candidate home), the two priests were ordering textbooks, chalk, and desks, everything one needs to run a school. Once the Cistercians had leased Merici Hall on Walnut Hill Lane from the Ursuline nuns, they began to transform the old



*Fun at the Bret's ranch near Waxahachie, April 1962.
Left: Jane Bret walks with (l-r) Fr. Gilbert Hardy and Fr. Philip Seitz.
Right: (l-r) Fr. Anselm Nagy, Fr. Thomas Fehér, and William Bret.*



President John F. Kennedy asked, "Why the moon?" in a speech at Rice University on September 25, 1962.

The "Space Race" launched a new era in American education

The "Space Race" officially began on October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union launched the first Sputnik satellite.

The subsequent "Space Race" changed American culture and life in many ways. In addition to an obsession with all things related to space and a heightened fear of Soviet imperialism, Sputnik prompted Americans to turn a critical eye toward the nation's educational system. Cistercian became one of many "Sputnik schools" that placed a greater emphasis on math and science.

Within five years of the Sputnik launch, the United States responded with the first manned space flight of John Glenn.

Just weeks after Cistercian Prep opened on September 4, 1962, President John F. Kennedy addressed the critics of his goal to send a man to the moon at Rice University.

"Why, some say, the moon?" Kennedy asked on September 12, 1962. "Why choose this as our goal?"

"And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic?"

"Why does Rice play Texas?"

mansion into a schoolhouse. [The Ursulines had housed boarders there through the end of the 1961 school year.]

Ideas and concepts on how to blend the best of the European educational traditions with modern American ideas bubbled out of the 49-year-old Fr. Damian. Some were rooted in his experiences teaching at secondary schools in Europe, others derived from work at universities in America. In Hungary, he had taught Hungarian language and literature at the Cistercian school in Budapest (including Fr. Melchior in Form I and Fr. Daniel in Form VI). In the United States, Fr. Damian taught Latin at a university in Buffalo, New York, and psychology at the University of Dallas.

His interests ranged far and wide, and his open mind picked up ideas everywhere. Fr. Damian read about education and he listened to parents.

"We did not consider ourselves teachers," Fr. Melchior explained. "We saw ourselves as educators." Fr. Damian studied the most current thinking on education and sought to integrate it into the new school.

This openness fit nicely in the sixties, a decade that was to stretch everyone's sensibilities. Only a year before, President Kennedy had promised that Americans would walk on the moon by the end of the decade. Anything was possible.

He heard parents complain that their sons misbehaved in the parochial schools because they were bored. Fr. Damian proposed an advanced math and



Fr. Melchior Chladek (left) served as the right-hand man for Fr. Damian Szödényi during the months preceding the school's opening in September 1962.

science curriculum. In Form I, Fr. Melchior would introduce microscopes, which were traditionally reserved for high school students. Fr. Damian directed Fr. Bede, who had earned a master's in history, to teach a course on ancient civilizations to the youngsters. In addition, the curriculum would include geography, languages, literature, music, and art. The teachers would, one day, have a master's in their field.

"If you think I'm going into that creepy, old place," erupted nine-year-old Brian Melton as his mother's car stopped in front of the new Cistercian Preparatory School for the first time, "you're crazy."

Dear me, thought 42-year-old Janice Melton as she glanced at the carpool line in her rear-view mirror.

The three-story stone structure towered condescendingly over her open convertible Thunderbird. Nothing about it resembled a conventional American school building.

But perhaps these anxious times required something out of the ordinary.

How could their boys compete in this ever-changing world if they didn't receive a top-notch education? Public, parochial, and private schools were failing — not just to challenge — but even to teach effectively.

At this new school, parents could rest assured that the best would be demanded from their boys.

All the parents of the 47 boys enrolled at the new Cistercian Preparatory School had looked forward to this Wednesday morning, September 5, 1962, for some time. A new era in North Texas education was dawning.

The day had started well enough for Mrs. Melton and her son. Driving on Walnut Hill Lane towards the new school, the two discussed the opening mass at the Cistercian monastery held in Irving the day before.

With sunglasses gleaming in the sunlight and her bouffant hairdo wrapped in a pink chiffon scarf, Mrs. Melton resembled a blonde version of Jackie Kennedy, the glamorous wife of the young

president. Melton was feeling rather sharp himself in his new gray pants, loafers, and black tie.

Until, that is, his mother slowed at the bottom of the hill, where a creek known as Bachman Branch met the two-lane blacktop, and she turned her T-Bird onto the driveway at 4838 Walnut Hill.

As the convertible followed the creeping carpool line along the long curving driveway, Melton's mood changed. Cedar trees lined both sides, like soldiers leading young Melton to the gallows. Strain though he might, he could not see beyond them. His hand reached for the top button of his scratchy new Oxford shirt; he stretched his chin up.

A small building (an out building) eventually came



The ties required in the early days came off quickly after school.

into view, followed by the side of the massive home.

Up close, Merici Hall's size and roughhewn materials felt foreign. Its windows seemed to hide secrets. On the other side of the driveway, the front lawn was teeming with trees, bushes, and dark corners.

Melton's right hand pushed the knot on his tie one way as he twisted his neck to the other. When the car made its final stop in front of the school, he couldn't help but erupt.

Mrs. Melton's eyes flashed between the three-story stone structure to her right, her spooked son in the seat beside her, and the priest hovering near the open front doors of the edifice.

After ten minutes in carpool line — and with dozens of cars behind them — she pursed her lips briefly.

The story behind Cistercian's old school house

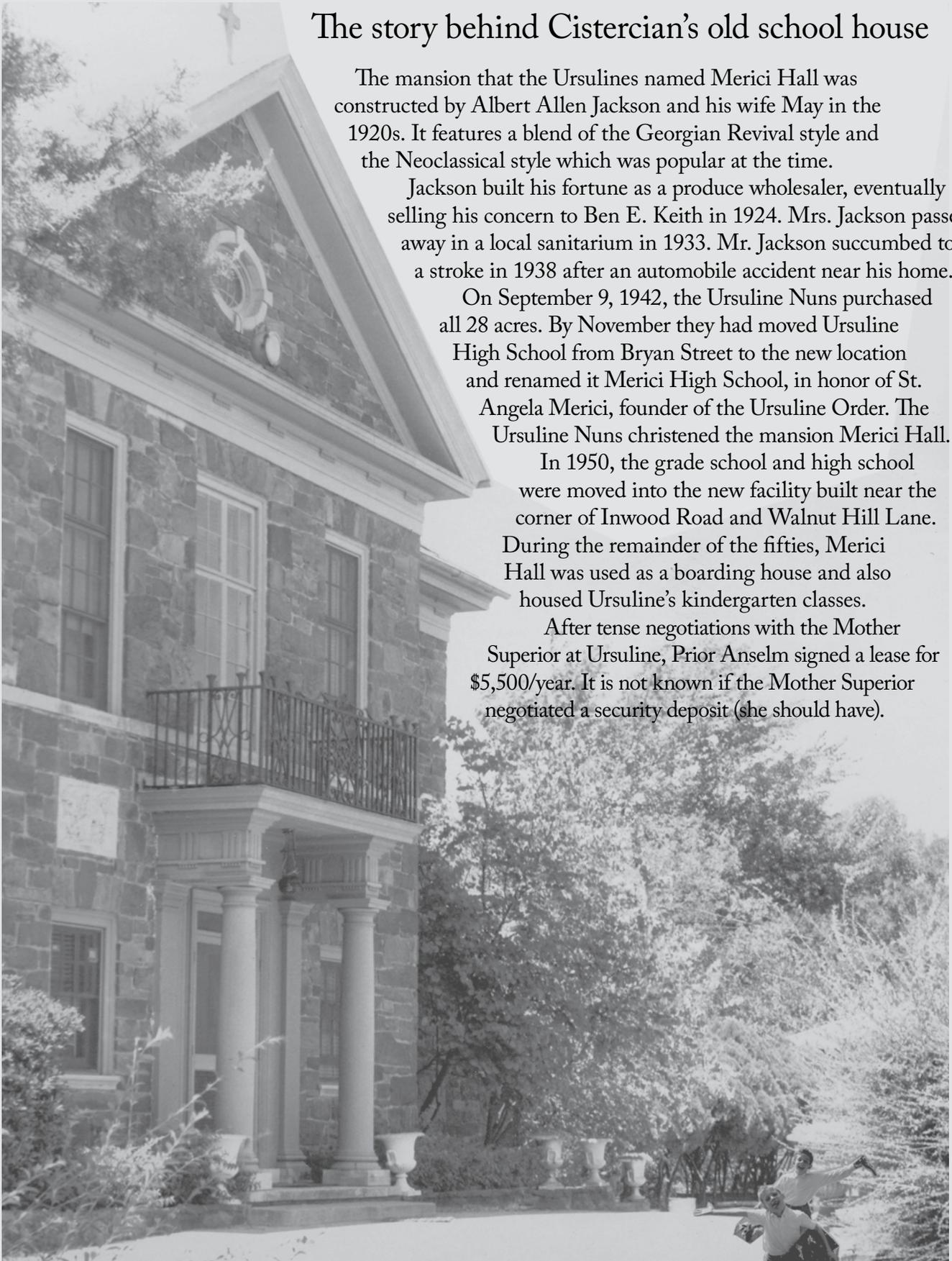
The mansion that the Ursulines named Merici Hall was constructed by Albert Allen Jackson and his wife May in the 1920s. It features a blend of the Georgian Revival style and the Neoclassical style which was popular at the time.

Jackson built his fortune as a produce wholesaler, eventually selling his concern to Ben E. Keith in 1924. Mrs. Jackson passed away in a local sanitarium in 1933. Mr. Jackson succumbed to a stroke in 1938 after an automobile accident near his home.

On September 9, 1942, the Ursuline Nuns purchased all 28 acres. By November they had moved Ursuline High School from Bryan Street to the new location and renamed it Merici High School, in honor of St. Angela Merici, founder of the Ursuline Order. The Ursuline Nuns christened the mansion Merici Hall.

In 1950, the grade school and high school were moved into the new facility built near the corner of Inwood Road and Walnut Hill Lane. During the remainder of the fifties, Merici Hall was used as a boarding house and also housed Ursuline's kindergarten classes.

After tense negotiations with the Mother Superior at Ursuline, Prior Anselm signed a lease for \$5,500/year. It is not known if the Mother Superior negotiated a security deposit (she should have).





(Left) Pre-Formers (fourth graders) pose with their form master, Fr. Daniel Csányi, during the 1962-63 school year. Only five would graduate with the Class of 1971. (Right) First Formers pose with their form master, Fr. Bede Lackner. Ten would graduate with the Class of 1970.

“Brian,” she said, a stream of cigarette smoke escaping through her lips, “have a good day at your new school.”

Inside the double doors and up a couple of steps, boys noisily trampled the black-and-white-marbled floors of the expansive lobby. In their hurried exploring and searching, they couldn’t help noticing the height of the monstrous doorways and the twelve-foot ceilings that dwarfed them.

Back against the front wall, a grand staircase climbed to the second story. As they looked up and around in amazement — vaguely responding to directives barked by priests — bodies bumped, turned, and twisted their way toward the two classrooms.

Fr. Daniel Csanyi, 32, quickly corralled the 22 Pre-Form students (or fourth graders) in the home’s large living room that occupied the entire east wing of the first floor. In addition to pairs of large windows on the north and south walls, the room featured a fireplace on the east wall flanked by two even larger windows.

As Pre-Form form master, Fr. Daniel had been selected by Fr. Damian to shepherd this group

through their years at the new school. He also would teach religion and penmanship (thanks to the nice job he’d done on the signs for each room in the school).

Brand new desks, ordered over the summer by Fr. Melchior Chladek, were arranged facing a blackboard on wheels at the north end of the room.

The 25 First Formers (or fifth graders) were directed up the grand staircase to the conservatory in the center of the second floor by their form master, 34-year-old Fr. Bede Lackner.

If the first-floor classroom felt elegant, its upstairs counterpart could safely be regarded as spectacular.

Upon entering for the first time, the students were struck by the far, southern end of the room with its semi-circular shape and seven picture windows, which bathed the room in light and offered a view of the thick trees in back of the house.

Fr. Bede, an accomplished historian with a degree from Marquette University, stood next to a blackboard in front of the windows and between two columns, urging the boys into their seats. He explained that he would teach geography, history, and music.



Fr. Daniel Csányi’s Pre-Formers took the large living room which featured a fireplace and mirror.

Upstairs and down, at approximately 8:30 am, Fr. Bede and Fr. Daniel led their classes in a prayer to the Holy Spirit and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Classes at Cistercian had begun.

“Cato, Cicero, Solon, Aristoteles,” sang the First Formers in Fr. Bede’s music class, *“caeciderunt in profundum maris.”* While reinforcing some of their Latin lessons, the ditty was Fr. Bede’s way of teaching the boys to sing together.

“The melody is quite impressive,” said Fr. Bede recently. “I had the boys perform it just the way I learned it from my Cistercian teacher in the old country. It is a ‘round’ [e.g., ‘Row, row, row your boat’ sung over ‘gently down the stream’] and easy polyphony.”

The lyric joyfully suggests that the giants of Roman philosophy “may drown in their sea of profundity.” It proved memorable enough that members of the Class of 1970 remember it decades later.

In his Latin class, Fr. Damian used a stop watch to time the boys as they raced through conjugations. The competition made learning Latin fun.

In addition to five class periods per week of Latin, math, and English, the First Form curriculum included three class periods of biology (sometimes referred to as “zoology” in school literature to give it an advanced-sounding ring).

Fresh from completing his master’s degree in biology at St. Louis University, Fr. Melchior taught science with a hands-on approach that employed microscopes and lots of live animals and insects.

In addition to music, Fr. Bede taught his boys three class periods each of history and geography.

While the First Formers enjoyed the fruits of

advanced, yet traditional subject matter, the Pre-Form suffered through a monotonous schedule weighed down by two class periods per day of both math and English.

Parents like Jane Bret had pushed for the basics.

“There was a noticeable difference between my daughter at Ursuline who was learning to read and write,” Bret remembers, “and my boys at St. Monica who couldn’t do anything.”

The boys at Cistercian received a full dose of the basics and substantial sums of homework. The teachers were encouraged to push the boys.

“I didn’t deliberately change my vocabulary in my teaching,” remembered Jerry O’Brien recently.

“I used adult words, challenging the guys with the expectation that they would grow.”

“It seemed to work.”

“We were pretty good in class,” remembered Paul DeCleva who left Cistercian after his freshman year to attend Culver Military Academy.

“It was when we were out of class,” he added, “that we went a little bonkers.”

It was these moments outside the confines of the classroom’s four walls that tested the mettle of the

faculty, especially Fr. Damian and his philosophy that boys should be self-disciplined.

“It was brought to the attention of Fr. Damian,” read the minutes from faculty meeting on September 4, 1962, the day before school opened its doors, “that there should be supervision of the boys during study hall and lunch.”

At the September 19 faculty meeting, “it was decided that before and after the bells, the students must form recess lines. Teachers must lead the students up or down the stairs.”

The grand staircase proved irresistible. Its narrow climb was divided into several sections, each with its



Fr. Bede Lackner conducted the First Form through their paces in a second-floor room that featured a semi-circle of windows overlooking the grounds to the south that occasionally distracted the boys from blackboard.



Boys at play on the large front lawn of the Merici property. The Walnut Hill campus included nine acres that featured a creek bed and lots of trees.

own landing. A teacher at one end of the stairs could do little about misbehavior at other points along its length.

“We used to love to show up early in the morning before anyone got there,” remembered Buck Smith ’71,

“We’d have these ridiculous games of bombardment on the stairway using chalkboard erasers and volley balls.

“Poor Fr. Daniel would often arrive to find us in a lather from the early morning warfare. I am sure that he thought we were wild hooligans.”

“Before 8 am,” the minutes of the January 11, 1963 faculty meeting noted, “there is too much movement in the building. The students should go to their classrooms and study. The form masters are responsible for the discipline of their respective class.

“Students may also be allowed to go to the library [the large wood-paneled room in the center of the house on the first floor] before school begins, but should be supervised while there.”

This problem would persist since many students lived very

close by and the priests and teachers (other than Mother Miriam) didn’t.

The boys’ love for the place was clearly taxing the faculty’s numbers, time, and know-how.

Jerry O’Brien and Mother Miriam had teaching experience in American schools, but only in teaching girls at Ursuline.

None, of course, had ever started a school from scratch or conducted operations on grounds as large and rambling as Merici Hall.

“Teachers should be present during recess periods,” the February 8 faculty meeting notes stated. “Play periods should be held on the basketball courts and the field; students are not allowed to go near the bridge or the creek.”

If the house had posed a problem for the faculty members to supervise, the property’s unfenced, untamed nine acres, proved to be a potential nightmare.

The driveway provided spaces for games of four-square, “Snap the Whip,” or just running around.

Merici’s front lawn offered room to play football and soccer, plus its many layers of trees gave great cover for chasing games.

“I remember Mr. O’Brien amazed us with these booming punts of the football as we stood in the field trying to catch the ball,” said Buck Smith.

The Bachman Branch creek bed curved around the eastern and southeastern edge of the property.

“We used to love to run the creeks,” Paul DeCleva remembered. “You could wander around back there forever. We’d even go over there on weekends.”

First faculty

<i>Math</i>	Jerry O’Brien
<i>English*</i>	Mother Miriam
<i>Latin</i>	Fr. Damian
<i>History</i>	Fr. Bede
<i>Biology</i>	Fr. Melchior
<i>Geography</i>	Fr. Bede
<i>Religion</i>	Fr. Daniel
<i>Music</i>	Fr. Bede
<i>Penmanship</i>	Fr. Daniel
<i>Spanish</i>	Fr. Aloysius
<i>French</i>	Fr. Balthasar
<i>Art</i>	Mr. Ralph Quirk
<i>PE</i>	Dr. Emeric DeGall

* Called Language Arts in the handbook (included grammar, spelling, and reading)

“Our family lived in the neighborhood surrounding Merici,” Buck Smith said. “We used to have the greatest fun walking to and from school via our neighbor’s backyard access to the creek.”

“We would run up and down that creek on the way to and from school, often looking for snakes, frogs, and turtles.”

“There was an old iron bridge that crossed the creek between Merici and Ursuline Academy,” added Mike Kurilecz

recently. “We were warned not to cross under pain of death.”

A second wooden bridge crossed a smaller creek to the west.

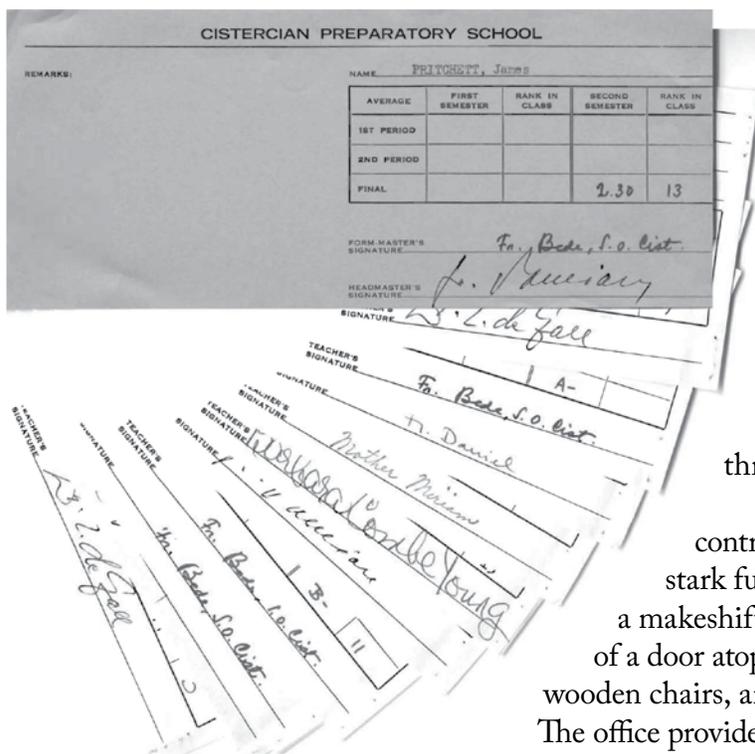
“We ran across that one every day to play in the larger field as well as to get to the tennis courts and to play in the woods,” Kurilecz said. “If we got enough of us on the bridge we would jump up and down and it would bounce.

“Our attempts to bounce it out of existence usually came to a halt when Mr. O’Brien would yell, ‘You guys. Cut it out!’”

“In the woods and the big field,” Kurilecz added, “we would often separate into groups of Yankees and Confederates and play war games during recess.

“Stalking each other behind trees and shooting imaginary guns. Don’t tell our parents but sometimes we threw rocks at each other!”

“It was a jungle full of adventure,” Smith remembered, “that gave us the opportunity for all kinds of Lord of the Flies type mischief that does not bear repeating. Among other things, I remember a large group of us taunting the elderly neighbors who lived in big houses along the creek bed and who seemed to take umbrage at the spectacle of unruly gangs of unsupervised boys running wild in the woods. Boy that was fun.”



Report cards from the second semester 1963, with “Class rank” noted.

The headmaster’s office on the northwest corner of Merici Hall’s second floor featured 12-foot ceilings, expensive molding, and splendid views of the large front lawn through six-foot windows. The room’s elegant shell contrasted with Fr. Damian’s stark furniture, which included a makeshift desk (comprised of a door atop two file cabinets), wooden chairs, and assorted bookcases.

The office provided little refuge for the priest at the hub of the school’s operations, just as it failed to insulate him from the odor of Fr. Melchior’s turtles in the nearby bathroom.

Midway through the school’s first year, the headmaster’s problems were mounting.

Grades from the first quarter had shocked parents. The Pre-Form — with its emphasis on basic writing, reading, and arithmetic — scraped by with a class average of 2.37.

The First Formers — with their accelerated load of ancient history, biology, and Latin — had managed a class average of just 1.89.

Parents wanted a challenging curriculum for their boys, but they didn’t want their boys to fail.

“The faculty expresses its appreciation for the interest the parents showed after mid-term examinations,” read the December 10, 1962 circular to the parents. “We are certain that this mutual understanding will be the only basis and healthiest method to solve the great problems of education: both intellectual and moral.”

In January, Fr. Damian instructed teachers to ease up on the grading for the end of Cistercian’s first semester.

“Final marks will be a picture of the child for the whole year [fall of ’62],” the notes from the faculty meeting of January 11, 1963 stated. “There should not be an averaging of the grades, but a complete picture of the boy.”

“Marks are not the most important thing at this level,” Fr. Damian noted as matter of record in the faculty meeting, “rather what the boy learns and achieves is of primary importance.

“It is possible,” he continued, “that a child may receive lower grades in this school than he did in his former one and learn more than he did previously.”

On January 18, a faculty meeting was held “to discuss the grades and ranks of the students” for the end of the first semester.

The result: a healthy jump in GPAs, especially for the First Formers, whose class average leaped from 1.89 to 2.16 (the Pre-Form improved from 2.37 to 2.48).

Student behavior proved a more difficult problem to remedy.

“Discipline was an issue from the get-go,”

claimed Daniel Csanyi (the former Fr. Daniel). “Fr. Damian had read some books on the subject and became a true believer in the power of motivation rather than punishment.

“Most of the time it worked,” emphasized Csanyi, “since the kids were from solid homes. But not all the time.”

“Back in 1963, I had no inkling of what ADD or ADHD was,” he added. “But some of the kids exhibited definite symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and were beyond the reach of ‘*motivation*.’”

In the early years at Cistercian, teachers had their methods.

“[Fr. Daniel] will be your friend if you are his friend,” a First Former wrote in the first edition of *The Nest*, the school newspaper. “If you misbehave in his class, you will get a

Fr. Damian on school discipline

Out of the troubled educational landscape of the early sixties, Fr. Damian Szödényi brought a warm and optimistic, albeit controversial, view of education.

Fr. Damian envisioned a “homey atmosphere created by emphasizing self discipline, responsibility, and freedom, instead of pressing hard and rigorous disciplinary measures.”

“The purpose of education is the full integration of the individual,” Fr. Damian told parents in 1964, “for only in this way can he act freely, fully, and responsibly.”

“We believe that there is only one method through which the education of the individual can be successfully maintained,” he continued, “that is the love of the individual.

“One cannot love without knowing,” he continued.

“We relax discipline and let him discover the need of self-discipline.”

“By eliminating fear, we hope to create freedom, without which real love cannot exist.

“The model of an educator, in our way of thinking, is not a drill sergeant,” he added, “but it is Christ as He was understood by the greatest men.”

While many teachers agreed with Fr. Damian’s principle — that man, even in the form of a boy, is good at heart — they found its application problematic.

Fr. Damian sought bright students — identified through individually administered Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests — upon whom “the importance of education” could be impressed.

“When students are made aware of the importance of education,” he said, “they mature early and they understand that school is necessary; that it is not their enemy. On the contrary, for them learning becomes high adventure.”



Fr. Damian congratulates a student at the school's first Closing Ceremonies in May 1963.

penance or a tap on the head with his book.”

“If someone got out of line,” remembered Csanyi, who also served as the penmanship teacher, “I would sentence him to writing down fifty times in his best cursive: ‘I will pay rapt attention in Father Daniel’s class.’”

Not every teacher had such powerful deterrents.

Much discussion on the issue of discipline took place during faculty meetings.

“Punishment of no recess can be given to students,” the notes from January 11, 1963 read. “Keeping them after school is not permissible at this time.”

On February 8, the following recommendation was made: “the sending of notes to the parents

The influence of Pat Haggerty, the genius of Texas Instruments

Patrick E. Haggerty relished the chance to help create a revolutionary new Catholic boys school in his adopted hometown of Dallas. It was not his first rodeo.

The son of a railroad telegraph operator in North Dakota, Haggerty built a prize-winning radio as a boy and became one of the state’s first ham-radio operators.

He graduated *summa cum laude* from Marquette University, where he received a degree in electrical engineering in 1936.

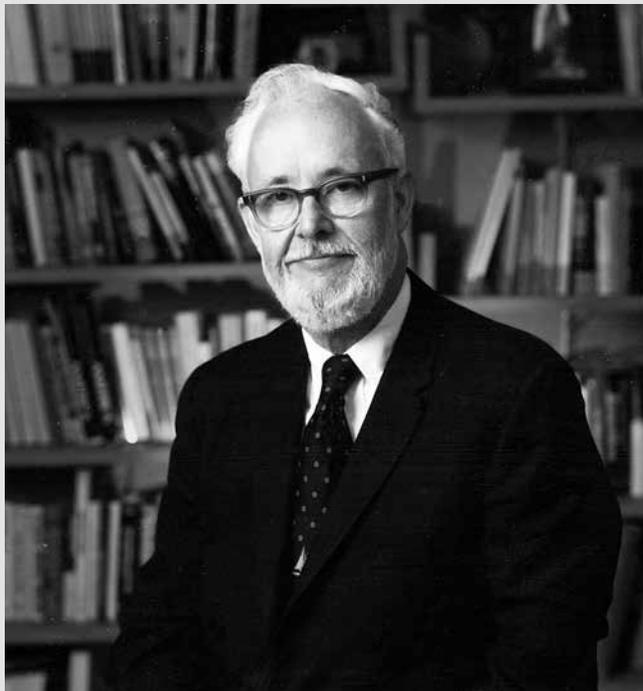
In 1942, he signed on as reserve officer in the Navy’s Bureau of Aeronautics and rose to the rank of lieutenant. During the last years of the war, he became head of the bureau’s electronics production branch which was responsible for the production of all airborne electronic equipment.

In November 1945, Eric Jonsson recruited the 31-year-old whiz kid to Geophysical Service Incorporated (GSI). Persuading Haggerty to join the firm that would become Texas Instruments, Jonsson said years

later, “was my greatest contribution to T.I.”

Given the resources to explore and research, Haggerty sparked the transformation of GSI, a company that used seismography to look for oil, into Texas Instruments, one of the world’s leading innovators in technology.

In 1951, when GSI officially changed its name to Texas Instruments, Haggerty was promoted to executive vice president and director. He was named president in 1958 and became chairman in 1966.



Patrick E. Haggerty played the pivotal role in turning Geophysical Service Inc. into the worldwide technological giant that is Texas Instruments. He was the youngest of the four seminal founders.

Under his leadership, TI introduced industry firsts including the first commercially available silicon transistors, the first germanium radio transistors, and the first practical integrated circuit.

During his tenure, Texas Instruments grew from 554 employees in 1946 to more than 38,000. Haggerty stepped down as chairman in 1976. He passed away in 1980.

Haggerty enjoyed his passion for sailing and raced his sloop, *Bay Bea*, competitively. He also participated in the syndicate that sponsored the *Intrepid*, winner

of the America’s Cup Races in the fall of 1967.

The importance of Haggerty’s involvement, generosity, and wisdom during the school’s formative years cannot be overstated.

and the keeping of students during recess may be used to handle disciplinary problems.” A glimmer of hope appeared with an entry on March 15.

“Discipline in the school appears to be better as a result of the use of workbooks,” although it was added, “politeness should be used by teachers and pupils. The boys should show respect for parents and teachers.”

Occasionally, teachers had difficulty disciplining boys politely.

Class masses, celebrated by the form masters, could be particularly difficult especially in that first year when the chapel was located downstairs on the sun porch. The semi-circular room just off the library featured seven large French doors with southern exposure.



Dr. Emeric DeGall, a Hungarian fencing champion in his day, provided expert lessons in the sport. He would also introduce soccer, medicine balls, and, most popular of all, bombardment into the consciousness of early Cistercian students.

“With vestments on top of my religious habit and with fifty or so warm bodies squeezed into a very limited space,” recalled Csanyi, “celebrating a mass in September or May was a real ordeal.”

Fr. Bede maintained order partly through his mastery of the 20-minute mass, remembered Jim Pritchett ’70. “And that was in Latin.” (“Those masses were challenging for the altar boys,” added Charlie Williams ’70, “Try saying ‘*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*’ in two seconds.)

But Fr. Daniel was not so fast.

“The boys were squeezed together like sardines on two or three rows of bleachers,” according to Csanyi. “No wonder they were restless and squirming.”

In one particular mass, “Owen Love kept picking on the kids around him. Since I was supposed to be caught up in prayer, I had no way of controlling the ‘congregation.’

“By the time we got to consecration, I had had it.

“I started out, ‘*Pridie quam pateretur ...*’ then I put the host down and thundered, ‘Owen, shut up!’

“The sudden interruption of the monotonous flow of Latin caught Owen totally unprepared. He stopped mid sentence and was quiet the rest of the way.”

On May 14, 1963, at the monastery in Irving, the Abbot’s Council approved a contract with the

University of Dallas that provided the Cistercian Fathers with 30 undivided acres on which they could develop the school and monastery.

This crucial step concluded a nearly three-year negotiation with University officials, settling once and for all the future location of Cistercian Prep School. (The Cistercians had seriously reviewed the possibility of building the school near the intersection of Marsh Lane and Valley View and another location near the intersection of Royal Lane and O’Connor.)

With the location of the school finally resolved, planning of the first building began in earnest.

Bryan F. Smith, husband of one of the three founding moms, played

a key role behind the scenes advising Prior Anselm. He had served as the lead lay advisor since early 1961. The Smiths had hosted a buffet for interested parents in May 1961, when Fr. Moses Nagy was presumed to be the best candidate for headmaster.

Smith had been there the following month when Prior Anselm offered Fr. Damian the job as headmaster (in fact, it may have been at Smith’s suggestion).

And as chairman of the advisory committee, Smith was hovering in the background throughout that first year at Merici, even though his oldest son remained in fourth grade at St. Mark’s, rather than in Pre-Form at Cistercian.

By May, Smith’s two oldest boys (Buck ’71 and

Jim '72) were poised to enter Cistercian in September.

Representing the parents (and perhaps Prior Anselm), Smith provided a concise assessment of the 1962-63 school year from the parents' point of view. It targeted two of Fr. Damian's seminal principles of education.

First, Smith believed the official school policy on discipline (as stated in the Rules and Regulations dated October 1, 1962) lacked clarity.

Ambiguity in this policy, asserted Smith, allowed individual teachers to discipline students in their own way. Presumably, Smith believed that a more consistent policy would be more effective.

Smith also noted that some parents believed that Fr. Damian was overly influenced by Professor John Dewey's progressive educational philosophies. Dewey's work championed a "learn-by-doing" and team-oriented learning style rather than traditional rote learning.

While some parents may not have appreciated what they considered Fr. Damian's overly lenient attitude, the boys loved this about the man they would name "The Bear."

"Fr. Damian always tried to find the good thing about you, what you excelled in," said Steve McAuliff '71. "He tried to find the positives in people."

The disciplinary and philosophical problems were compounded by the fact that the number of applications for the following year's Pre-Form had dropped sharply. The enthusiasm and optimism of 1962 was evaporating in 1963.

Chapter 2

Struggling identities — 1963 - 1969

The second year of classes at Merici Hall saw boys running everywhere. Seventeen new students (well below the target of 25) entered the new Pre-Form class and the first two classes returned pretty much intact and ready to rumble.

The rest rooms were expanded to accommodate the additional students and a playing field was carved. The faculty also grew. Mr. Paul McArdle joined to help Mother Miriam in the “language arts,” while Fr. Thomas Fehér and Fr. Matthew Kovács taught geography and Latin. Fr. Ralph March began a boys’ choir. Arnold Favela replaced Ralph Quirk as the art instructor.

Two new form masters were put to the task. Fr. Aloysius, who had served as a part-time Pre-Form Spanish teacher during the first year at Merici Hall, took over as form master of the new Pre-Form. And

Fr. Melchior replaced Fr. Bede as form master of the Second Form.

The smallish size of the new Pre-Form suited the building well. They could be accommodated upstairs in the bedroom on the southwestern side of the building that had previously served as the science room.

The elder two forms switched venues. The Second Form moved downstairs to the east classroom. The First Form moved upstairs.

“Our first form classroom was a long, somewhat narrow room on the second floor,” remembered Robert Bellamy ’71. “We faced the south end of the room, which was a semi-circle conservatory. And the cool thing was that the blackboard was right in the center of the conservatory, framed all by itself. You couldn’t help but stare at it ... all day long.

“On either side of the room, two large perforated

screens, about four feet tall, hid giant radiators that provided heat in the winter,” added Bellamy. “The perforations were the exact circumference of crayons, which we discovered would melt beautifully when jammed into the screens — impossible to clean up and an endless source of delight to us.”

A year older and accustomed to the routine, each other, the Hungarians, and the property, the boys’ wings spread.

They began to exploit language and cultural nuances with which the highly educated Hungarian priests could not have been familiar.

New recruits were subjected to Street English 101.

“The priests introduced us to Fr. Aurel Mensáros, a pink-cheeked cherub of a newly ordained priest who didn’t speak English very well,” Bellamy recalled. “Their idea was that he’d sit in the back of the classroom to pick up some English.”

“Well, he picked up quite a bit, especially the very special words and phrases we whispered to him, which he dutifully wrote down in a notebook. I think that little experiment lasted less than a week, but we laughed about it for months. Hey, we’re still laughing!”

“He looked right at me!” screamed Ray Foley ’70 as President John F. Kennedy’s motorcade drove by the group of Cistercian Second Formers standing near the old Delman Theater, a few minutes before noon on November 22, 1963.

Dressed in their distinctive gray pants, white shirts, and black ties, the gaggle of Cistercian boys waving wildly seemed to catch the president’s eye. But

in a matter of seconds the motorcade passed and Fr. Melchior gathered the boys for the short drive back to school.

Fr. Damian had sent notes home the day before notifying parents that classes would be cancelled between 11 am and 2:15 to make allowances for all who planned to see the president (and those attending the presidential lunch at the Trade Mart).

Paul DeCleva, Buck Smith, and Jimmy Smith had been driven over to the corner of Mockingbird Lane and Lemmon Avenue, near the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant, by Mr. Smith.

“It lasted all of about five minutes,” DeCleva recalled of the visit to the motorcade route. Since classes would not resume until 2:15, Mr. Smith dropped the boys at the Smith residence, just a short walk from campus. The boys began a game of basketball.

Cars began arriving back on campus at about 12:15. The students played outside on the warm, sunny day.

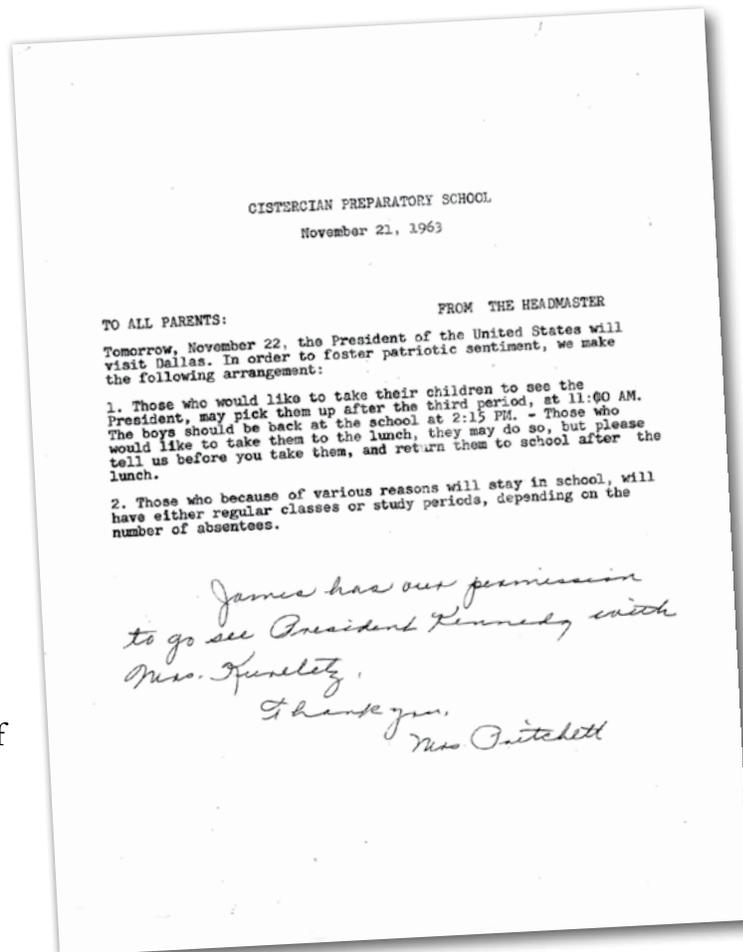
“I was out in the meadow behind the building,” remembered Daniel Csányi, “trying to maintain law and order in the rambunctious crowd.”

Then the normally ruddy-faced Paul McArdle approached Fr. Daniel, white as a sheet.

“They shot the president,” McArdle whispered. “Recess is over. Bring the kids up to the chapel.”

Teachers rounded up the boys from the various parts of the grounds and ushered them up to the chapel (which had been relocated to the third floor).

Fr. Damian delivered the solemn news of the



Letter from Mrs. Pritchett authorizing her son Jim '70 to watch the presidential motorcade with Mrs. Kurilecz.

president's death shortly after 1 pm.

"I remember watching tears stream down the faces of Fr. Daniel and several other Cistercians," said Jim Smith '72. "I had never seen grown men cry before."

Fr. Daniel led the school in a rosary and then a mass, but he was overcome with tears on several occasions. Fr. Damian stepped in until Fr. Daniel was prepared to continue.

"I would describe [the early sixties] as my honeymoon with America," Csányi recalled, reflecting on his outpouring of emotion.

"The assassination ended the honeymoon," he admitted. "I was crying not just for the man I saw two hours earlier, waving and smiling at us on Lemmon Avenue, but I was crying for America."

"Fr. Daniel's brave and emotional behavior that day had a profoundly positive effect on me and still does to

The chapel was moved to the third floor after the first year at Merici Hall. On November 22, 1963, Fr. Daniel Csányi and Fr. Damian conducted a mass for the fallen president. Below, Abbot Anselm celebrates mass.

this day," said Gary Cunningham '72. "It was one of the most important lessons of empathy that I have ever received."

"Any student who went to Cistercian at the 'old school,'" added Jim Smith, "heard lots of vivid recollections from the priests about their individual escapes from Hungary after the Communist takeover.

"It was especially wonderful that each personal story was a little different from the others, certifying their authenticity and richness.

"But, perhaps the most poignant indicator of the trials and terrors the Cistercians had experienced in their motherland was the pain and anguish on their faces upon learning the president of their new home country had been assassinated."

That night at the monastery, the monks elected Prior Anselm as their first abbot. He received his abbatial blessing on January 5, 1964 from Bishop Gorman at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in downtown Dallas and was now officially Abbot Anselm.



While the faculty undertook changes to make life better for the boys during their second year in Merici Hall, the founding families and Prior Anselm continued their efforts to secure a location for the school.

The issue triggered a chess match between the bishop and Prior Anselm. The bishop initially proclaimed that the school could not be located near the Cistercian monastery. He had been influenced by advisors who feared that a secondary school so nearby would erode the monks' dedication to the University (sage advice).

Days later, Prior Anselm made his own announcement: He planned to transfer the monastery

monastery's existing location.

Inside the monastery, Prior Anselm was disappointed but relieved. Unbeknownst to the bishop, the monks — most of whom taught at the university — had voted down Prior Anselm's plan to move the monastery.

The Cistercian Abbey and School would be located in Irving.

"The Irving location made it paramount that the school strive for excellence," Bryan Smith insisted. "There was not room for a 'me too' school, certainly not one out in Irving in those days. The striving for excellence, the dedication to this over time, was the single most important factor in the growth of the school. It still defines the place."

Smith and Pat Haggerty insisted that the school be designed to reflect that excellence and called upon the most renowned Texas architect of the day to handle the job. O'Neil Ford had completed several projects for Texas Instruments as well as Trinity University in San Antonio, Skidmore College in New York, the University of Dallas, the Haggertys' Dallas residence, and, years later, the Smiths' residence.

Ford frequently just sketched out his ideas on the back of a napkin and then let his staff work out the details, but as Smith said, "He guaranteed you'd end up with something distinctive."

Another aspect of the job was to design a building that could be built around easily, allowing for future growth. Duane Landry, who worked in Ford's office, handled much of the detail work, but Smith said, "Neil's fingerprints were all over the thing."

"Neil possessed the innate skills to integrate buildings into the Texas landscape," Smith added. "He was a natural fit for the project. We wanted something unique, and it turned out to be just that. I think it has withstood the test of time very well."

"It is a completely different feeling to be present



Recess at the Walnut Hill campus often meant improvising games like "Snap the Whip," playing army, exploring the nearby creek bed, or just chasing each other.

to a 51.8-acre site called the Georges' estate at the corner of Marsh Lane and Valley View Lane (now the site of Brookhaven College). Prior Anselm had favored this site for the school and for the abbey since the Cistercians would own all rights to the land (unlike the land in Irving). The Prior's announcement startled the bishop.

Realizing U.D. could not afford to lose the services of the Cistercians, he reversed his earlier decision. With characteristic bravado, the bishop announced that the Cistercians were hereby forbidden from building the school anywhere but in the vicinity of the



On a rare visit to the Walnut Hill Lane campus to hear a performance of the choir, Abbot Anselm addresses the boys and parents. Fr. Anselm received the title of abbot on November 22, 1963 when the priory was elevated to an abbey.

at this meeting,” Fr. Damian told his audience after dinner at the Dallas Federal Savings & Loan on February 24, 1964. He was reflecting on the cocktail party presentation at the Smith’s home in May 1961.

“Now we have the school,” he smiled, “we have the parents, pupils; a fine old school, sixty-two fine families, sixty-eight students of the greatest variety and a fine faculty: eleven Cistercian priests, one Ursuline nun, and four laymen.”

“And finally,” he added, “now I am not an observer but made responsible for all these [sic].”

“We have all four classes full for the next school year and have a few on a waiting list,” he bellowed. “We have achieved this interest in our school with the minimum direct advertisement or publicity. We achieved it through the kind, good words of the satisfied parents of our students.”

But he also was responsible to those parents, and while many highly recommended the school, others continued to pressure the headmaster on a variety of fronts, and not always in a consistent direction.

“The headmaster reported the remarks of some of the parents,” read the minutes from the October 1963

faculty meeting, “who think that their children are not challenged enough because of their small amount of homework, and he expressed the opinion of those parents who think that the homework is too much.”

Still, Fr. Damian strove to work with parents right from the start.

Notes from the September 19, 1962 faculty meeting directed, “A relationship is to be formed between the parents and the school by means of working committees. These working committees will be organized for the purpose of aiding and strengthening the school.”

However, it noted pointedly, “Working committees will not be policy-forming organizations.”

The committees were organized by the spring semester of the first year and did accomplish a number of objectives that included taking the kids to an opera (“The Barber of Seville”) and organizing sports teams.

“We started working together only clumsily,” Jane Bret remembered recently. “Fr. Damian did not want interference.”

“Friendly relationships must be built between the school and the parents of the students,” Fr. Damian

Parents and priests build strong bonds outside of school

“How would you like to go to Fish Creek this weekend with the Haggertys?” asked Fr. Damian, poking his smiling face into Fr. Daniel’s office twenty minutes before the final bell one Friday. Taken aback, Fr. Daniel wondered how it could be possible to arrange a trip so quickly?

“Where is Fish Creek?” he asked.

“On Green Bay near Lake Michigan,” Fr. Damian answered. “The Haggertys’ private jet will fly us up and back. Don’t worry. Go pack some clothes,” Fr. Damian said, hurrying out the door.

While Fr. Daniel was serving as the form master for the Haggertys’ son Mike ’71, he was not accustomed to such treatment.

“It was a wonderful weekend,” Daniel Csányi recalled. “We ate in a superb restaurant with spectacular views and stayed at the Haggertys’ beautiful home, a renovated 19th-century barn on the tip of the peninsula. We sailed on their yacht. Mike [eleven years old at the time] and I capsized a boat Sunday morning. We were back in the monastery by Sunday evening.”

“The Haggertys were absolutely lovely hosts,” Fr. Daniel said.

Such occasional perks rewarded the priests for all their hard work, and the parents very much enjoyed the company of priests like Fr. Damian, Fr. Anselm, Fr. Henry, and Fr. Melchior.

The founding families frequently invited the priests to their homes (as did other families).

“My husband and I enjoyed the company of such learned men,” remembered Mrs. Bret. “They were very stimulating.” School matters dominated the conversations in 1962 and 1963.

“The parents and the priests engaged in endless hours of discussion in those first years,” remembers Jane Bret. The topics ranged from how to handle lunch (it was decided the boys would “brown bag” it to avoid the expense of a cafeteria) to fund-raising.

The demands of such an ambitious enterprise — in both time, money, and passion — forged deep bonds between the American suburbanites and the Hungarian refugees.

They shared a devout Catholic faith, a belief in the power of education, and an excitement over the prospects of establishing a school that might one day produce 15 to 20 real leaders every year. The founders felt the school might “eventually transform the whole area,” Mrs. Bret remembered.

The warm social connections between the priests and the founding families would be tested as the years wore on.

Inevitably, the parents’ focus on their boys’ welfare occasionally failed to harmonize with the priests’ vision for the future of the school and abbey. Nothing could change that.



On a trip to Fish Creek on Green Bay in Wisconsin, Fr. Damian (front) takes the helm under the watchful eye of Patrick Haggerty (behind flag). Haggerty, a native of Wisconsin and a graduate of Marquette University, was an expert sailor.

wrote in 1963. “This relationship should be based not on the principle of who dominates whom, but upon what is best for the education of the child.”

By the spring of 1965, he addressed this issue directly with parents.

“It is wonderful that [parents] are ready to make sacrifices, sometimes very great ones, in order to give their children the best possible formal education,” Fr. Damian noted in his address at the Empire Club on March 21, 1965, celebrating the dedication of the Middle School.

“It is not desirable, however,” he cautioned, “that parents make such a strong, almost paralyzing identification with their children, by which they would

By and large, of course, parents were happy with the education their boys were receiving at Cistercian. But disciplinary issues continued to bother some.

“Those parents who expected the strict discipline of the Cistercian schools in Hungary,” Fr. Melchior commented recently, “were disappointed.”

Some parents probably were confused by Cistercian’s pitch of a *gymnasium*-styled curriculum taught by Hungarians. While strict discipline played a key role in the European version, Fr. Damian felt that freedom should take center stage in this American reincarnation of the *gymnasium*.

Fr. Damian believed that when intelligent boys were presented with an interesting curriculum, they would submit willingly.

But coming from parochial schools, the boys were experiencing freedom for the first time. As they began to push boundaries, all seemed to revel in this new fantasy world complete with a Old World school building on nine wooded, creek-side acres. Curiosities and imaginations shifted into high gear.

Mix in a relaxed disciplinary philosophy with the unbelievably steep learning curve many of the Hungarians faced when it came to teaching pre-teens, learning the English language, and adapting to American teen culture, and it is a wonder that disciplinary issues didn’t close

the school down.

“Those who expected quick success with kids who were a terror at home,” Fr. Melchior added, “were frustrated that the school was unable to impose discipline on them.”

Parents weren’t the only ones who needed persuading that self-discipline might tame pre-teens; faculty members found it difficult to digest as well.

“It was a learning process for each faculty member,” Fr. Melchior said. “Teachers had to learn how to apply it in their own class.”

“When a student has been removed from the classroom for disciplinary reason,” an entry in the



Fr. Daniel (left) and Fr. Damian survey the excavation for the Middle School foundation in the spring of 1964. The train trestle can be seen in the distance. The lower parking lot has yet to be cleared.

transfer a great many of their frustrated dreams and desires to the child, then expect, demand, and even press the school to fulfill all these desires in their children.

“We all have to live our own lives,” he emphasized, “and not ones which are burdened by fears, anxieties, and frustrations of our parents.”

Parents had been the motivating force behind the school from the outset. They visited Fr. Damian in his office at Merici Hall. They invited him for dinner. He could not escape them.



First Former Peter Verhalen (pictured here at 10 years old) won the St. Bernard Gold Award in 1966.

Winner of the 1966 St. Bernard Gold award raises some eyebrows

In a February 8, 1963 faculty meeting, it was noted that “thought should be given as to the type of awards that will be given to the boys at the end of the year.”

In May of '63, various book awards were presented along with three Religious Committee Awards, one for each class (including Tim Johnson '70 and Jim Smith '72).

However, the third Religious Committee Award was reserved for First Former Paul Galvin. It read “for the outstanding student of the Cistercian Preparatory School. This award is based on character, behavior, and achievement.” The following year, these awards were renamed the St. Bernard Awards (silver and gold).

Near the conclusion of the 1965-66 school year, another First Former was nominated for the top award. In his endorsement, the boy's form master, Fr. John Vereb, declared Peter Verhalen a “wonderful specimen and a delightful person.” The faculty agreed and the precocious First Former won the St. Bernard Gold Award.

“Remember,” said Fr. Peter, anxious to downplay the accomplishment, “the school only went through Form IV that year.”

He and Galvin remain the youngest winners of the award. For Verhalen, the award marked the beginning of a highly decorated career at Cistercian Prep School and the Cistercian Abbey.

March 19, 1964 faculty meeting notes read, “keep the student in close proximity to the teaching situation.”

Some believed that the European disciplinary model still offered some important lessons.

“I have no doubt that the threat of physical punishment was an effective deterrent,” Csányi said in reflecting on his life as a Cistercian student at St. Emeric's in Budapest. “It was not used frequently, but we knew that if we got out of line, we'd get hit.”

But on the whole, “I don't think there was as much difference in behavior between the students in Hungary and the ones in Dallas as you might suspect,” Csányi reflected. “There were some priests [at St. Emeric's in Budapest] in whose classes chaos reigned.”

“I held several parents' meetings at Merici Hall during which every variety of subject was discussed,” said Fr. Melchior, “and discipline was never a major issue.”

Nevertheless, the notes of faculty meetings from the Merici period suggest that disciplinary issues remained a near-constant source of concern. The introduction of school bus transportation in the fall of 1964 would add a whole new dimension to these discussions.

“The results of the campaign to date,” Bryan F. Smith wrote to the 60 or so Cistercian families in April 1964, “have been somewhat disappointing.”

Nearing the end of its second year of operation, Smith was reminding parents that construction of the school's future home rested in their hands.

Those sixty families were responsible for \$180,000 of the \$410,000 project (the abbey had pledged \$100,000 and other sources would fill in the remaining \$130,000).

Construction had begun and yet parents had pledged only \$87,875 of the \$180,000 needed.

“When five large gifts are excluded,” Smith explained, “the average pledge for current parents is \$868.

“In order for this project to succeed,” he added, “it is imperative that parents ... re-evaluate their original pledges.”

Smith's letter (and the generosity of the 60 founding families) helped to jump start the campaign.

Construction on the new building was completed



(Left to right) Dr. Charles O. Galvin, Bryan F. Smith, Fr. Damian Szödényi, and Dr. E.A. Steinburger with youngsters Peter Smith '74 (left) and Buck Smith '71.

in time for classes to begin in January 1965.

Faculty members ate lunch, caught a few winks, and graded papers at their desks in the faculty room on the second floor of Merici Hall. Fans ran non-stop during the warm days of the year, sometimes blowing papers to the floor. Having previously served as the master bedroom for Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Jackson, the faculty room featured soothing views of the property to the east and south. The creek bed became visible during the winter months.

For a week during the first year of the school, Fr. Melchior's desk was crowded with neatly arranged rows of jars, each serving as a student's personal fruit fly colony.

"The critters were kept in each jar by a sheet of Saran wrap," recalled Daniel Csányi, "stretched to the top by a rubber band. Each jar had a sticker with a name on it.

Atkinson, Galt, Slaton, Brennan, Witbeck, etc."

"Problem was that some of the kids did less than a fair job sealing their jars," he said. "Before long we were all swatting at fruit flies."

"After several days of the Hitchcock-like invasion, I brought along a can of Raid, and squirted a puff of Raid into each one, then re-sealed them.

"When Fr. Melchior came back into the faculty room, there was no sign of life in a single jar. He was totally baffled by the untimely mass death of his protégés.

"When Mr. O'Brien suggested that the colony may have fallen victim to a quick spreading virus, the rest of us buried our heads in paperwork."

The minutes of faculty meetings suggest that their small number, close (often sweaty) quarters, and common goals made for a tight-knit group.

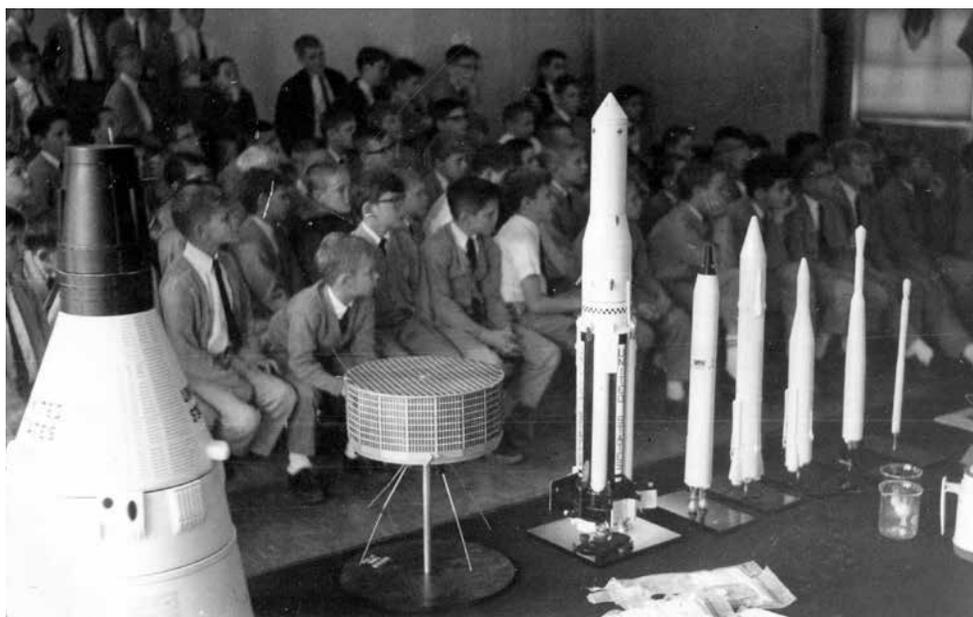
In March 1963, the faculty minutes commented, "at [the next] meeting Fr. Bede will discuss the

curriculum for history and geography which could be used in a boys' preparatory school."

Demonstration classes gave faculty members a chance to observe each others' teaching techniques. Discussions were held afterwards.

"It would facilitate matters," the faculty minutes from March 19, 1964 note, "if all the teachers would write their assignments in the attendance book. Students should be discouraged in calling one another for assignments."

The issue of class rankings and the always laborious student handbook ("grammar will be taken care of by a professional writer") also came up frequently.



In the fall of 1964, a speaker from NASA spoke to all four grades about the space agency's latest plans for achieving the goal of reaching the moon.

The final semester at Merici Hall burst into activity with 102 students arriving at the doorstep of the venerable home at 4838 Walnut Hill Lane. The September 6, 1964 opening day carpool line was abbreviated thanks to a brand new Ford school bus that delivered thirty or so students to campus (a second was put into operation a few weeks later).

Several memorable faculty members joined the faculty that year to accommodate the expanding student body.

Fr. Henry, 39, took over from Fr. Aloysius as the form master of the Second Formers (Class '72), who remained in the classroom on the southwestern

corner of the second story. Fr. Henry taught Latin and German.

Rodney Walter, 25, taught history, plus the new physics class for Form III (a subject with which he was less than familiar). He also would help to start the school's boy scout troop along with Fr. Daniel. (More on this can be found in Part Two of this book.)

Fr. John Vereb, a cigar-chomping, 40-year-old who had earned a master's in economics from SMU, directed the Pre-Form (Class '73) in the downstairs classroom, where he taught math to his "leettle broodders."

Three sisters from St. Mary of Namur (Sister St.

John, Sister John Teresa, and Sister Mary Frances) stepped in to help Paul McArdle with the English courses, allowing Mother Miriam to take her leave of the craziness.

The number of advanced degrees offered by the Cistercian priests was truly staggering; three with their doctorates, seven with their masters.

The music faculty that year stood out as particularly impressive. Fr. Ralph March had earned his doctorate in music in Paris (and would go on to serve as the musical director at the Cathedral of Cologne, Germany). Meanwhile,

Fr. George Ferenczy was a concert-level pianist. (Ferenczy's job in Wichita Falls, Texas in the early fifties played a key role in bringing the monastery to Dallas.)

Fr. Ralph put his Cistercian boys' choir through rigorous rehearsals and dressed them in white robes for their Christmas performances. Only those who could truly sing need apply. But that didn't stop one intrepid First Former.

"We had to sing something in front of the classroom, in front of our peers," recalled Fr. Peter Verhalen '73 who threw his hat in the ring in the fall of 1964. "I tried to sing *Jingle Bells*."

"He told me to sit down before I even finished the word 'bells.'"

A variety of events during the last few months at Merici Hall gave the students, faculty, and parents the feeling that Cistercian Prep School was especially blessed.

Fr. Melchior invited a speaker from NASA who came and made a presentation on the history of space exploration. He also updated the students on the agency's current operations, spoke of the need for scientists, and answered questions from the students.

A parent helped arrange for the Danish military band — in town for the Nieman-Marcus Fortnight — to perform on the front lawn at Merici Hall. The parents and kids especially seemed to appreciate the band's rendition of Dixie.

The boys participated in a fencing match at the Dallas Athletic Club under Dr. DeGall's direction. Two finished in the semi-finals and one made it to the finals.

Cistercian also participated in the Christ the King Procession in downtown Dallas with other Catholic schools.

It was the prospect of moving into a brand new building in Irving, however, that gave everyone a spring in their step.

They couldn't have known then what would be lost in the move.

"[Merici Hall] was peaceful, stately and inspiring," said Jim Bush '73. "The four small classes made it feel very intimate, as if we were all a family off on a great adventure."

"To me," reflected Robert Bellamy, "the beauty of the place was the wildness outside and the rarefied interior of the building, combined with the arcane mysteriousness of the monks themselves.

"In retrospect, the miracle was not just that the combination worked, but how well it worked, and how fresh the memories still are, nearly 50 years later."

For the parents, priests, and faculty, the move to Irving in January 1965 brought a sense of triumph and relief.

A small cadre of parents had succeeded in funding their part of the project from just 82 or so families (including parents of the newest class), and all were proud of the final product.

While the priests had struggled sometimes to make it to the Walnut Hill campus on time, they would now walk to work.

This concept of marrying the abbey and school, ironically, had never been a part of the Cistercian schools in Hungary. The Cistercian's five schools in Hungary were located in cities, far from the Abbey of Zirc, which sits in an isolated mountain village.

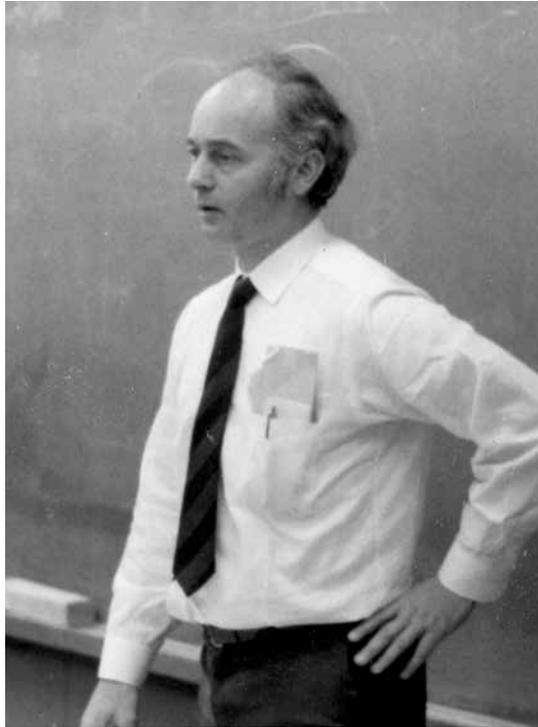
While the Abbey of Zirc and the Cistercians' schools thrived prior to World War II, the monks who taught in the schools could not participate in the community prayer life of the abbey.

In the late thirties, the newly elected Abbot Wendelin Endrédy pledged to find a solution to this problem. With the outbreak of the war and the subsequent Soviet oppression, however, he would never have the chance. Fortunately, he

lived to learn about the beautiful marriage of school and abbey in Irving.

While the location proved ideal for the monks (putting the monks on their home turf rather than the other way around as it had been on Walnut Hill Lane), it was a challenge for Cistercian families, most of whom lived in Dallas. Roads like SH 114 and Loop 12 were still being constructed. The school's busses and their drivers were worked hard. They became an extension of the social life (and disciplinary problems) of the school.

Lay faculty members gained individual offices and a teachers' lounge for a little bit of peace away from the



Jerry O'Brien taught math at Cistercian from its first year to 1987. He would be the only lay form master to graduate a class (Class of '71) until Bob Haaser (Class of '92).

boys. They would need it.

For all the meaningful changes that the Irving campus brought the parents, priests, and faculty, things didn't change much for students.

In fact, it might be likened to a move that would take place just six years later when the Dallas Cowboys moved from Dallas' Cotton Bowl to Irving's Texas Stadium. In their brand new digs at Texas Stadium, the football team just continued doing what they had been doing, just a bit more comfortably.

"The mentality we developed at Merici Hall of



Bishop Thomas Gorman (center with back to camera) blesses the school in June 1965. At left are Abbot Anselm Nagy (in white) and Fr. Louis Lékai. Fr. John Vereb is holding the book from which the bishop is reading. Headmaster Fr. Damian Szödényi stands at right.

running wild in the woods," suggested Buck Smith '71, "definitely carried over to the new school where we availed ourselves of a much more expansive swath of wilderness and much more creative ways to wreak havoc during recess."

Instead of nine manicured acres, 35 hilly and rugged acres entertained the boys in Irving. They featured a real live river, a creek, a lake, a bombardment cage, spear grass galore, and even a train trestle that evoked verses from Roger Miller's 1965 hit *King of the Road* ("Third boxcar, midnight train, destination ... Bangor, Maine").

Inside O'Neil Ford's brand new building, things were far different from Merici Hall, but the renowned

architect was kind enough to include an airy staircase that echoed the one on Walnut Hill.

A collegiate-caliber biology lab (with animal room) located on the first floor (where the small lecture hall is located today) broadcast the school's emphasis on the sciences.

On the southeast side of the first floor, a temporary "gym" was tucked behind the lunch room (where the vending machines and teachers' lounge are today).

The imbalance between the lavish biology lab and the picayune athletic facilities would take nearly seven years to remedy.

Even before the paint dried on the Middle School, plans were underway to design and raise the money for the Upper School, which they hoped could be completed in time to accommodate the school's first freshmen. (It would take several months longer than anticipated and was ready for occupancy in January 1967. During the fall of 1966, teachers and students had to make do with space available in the Middle School.)

"How long do you think you'll last?" Alan Thomasson '74 asked English teacher Stephen Housewright on his first day on the job in September 1969. The young English teacher may have been offended, but insolent

query reflected the students' frustrations over so many seriously flawed English teachers.

"Boy was I green when I began teaching in 1969," remembered Housewright, who would provide stability and excellence at Cistercian for ten years. "I knew the English Department had been in a state of flux for several years before I came, and Alan's question gave me some anxiety."

While many lay faculty members from Merici Hall remained (Paul McArdle taught English until 1972, Jerry O'Brien taught math through 1987, and Rodney Walter continued to teach history at the school until 2010), the English Department experienced a great deal of turnover. Art and science teachers also seemed

to come and go with regularity.

The move to the new school had been accompanied by an influx of young Hungarian monks. Fr. Aurel Mensaros, Fr. Bernard Marton, Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, Fr. Julius Leloczky, and Fr. Roch Kereszty had escaped Hungary in 1956. They brought a new attitude to the abbey and to the school.

In fact, Fr. Denis' attitude had found its way under the skin of both Abbot Anselm and Fr. Damian rather quickly. The 26-year-old with a doctorate in theology had completed his bachelor's and master's in math at TCU in just two years while also learning English. They also knew him to be a talented student of Hungarian literature. But he could be difficult, frequently contradicting the Abbot. So, he was put to the test.

Fr. Denis was assigned to serve as form master of the school's newest and largest class to date, the Pre-Form of 1965-66, with 25 students. He would sink or swim with them, teaching them eleven classes per week (eight math and three religion) plus supervising five study halls and one Form Master's period every week. When he wasn't standing in front of his form, he taught Form IV math (Class of 1970) or at the university.

Fr. Denis quickly earned a reputation for strict discipline, a sharp tongue, and unerring standards. Direct, cocky, and brilliant, he possessed a powerful personality and he proved to be an effective teacher and a prodigious worker.

This new breed of "no-nonsense" monk threatened to ruin much of the fun that had made the "old school" so memorable.

In September 1967, Cistercian Prep School appeared well on its way towards success and stability. The new Upper School Building opened and the school

boasted seven grades and 151 students. Behind the scenes, however, Abbot Anselm was scrambling to keep the enterprise going amidst complaints from both parents and priests.

"Our kids were like guinea pigs in those days," Jane Bret said recently, referring to the students on whom so many teachers were tested. She adored Fr. Damian but came to realize that some of his greatest assets created liabilities for the school.

"He was an educational psychologist. Fr. Damian

had a wonderful philosophy that there were no troubled boys at Cistercian, just boys having troubles adjusting to a rigid academic curriculum. I remember one boy who grew quite tall had some academic problems. Fr. Damian told his parents not to worry; he would do much better once he quit growing. And he was right."

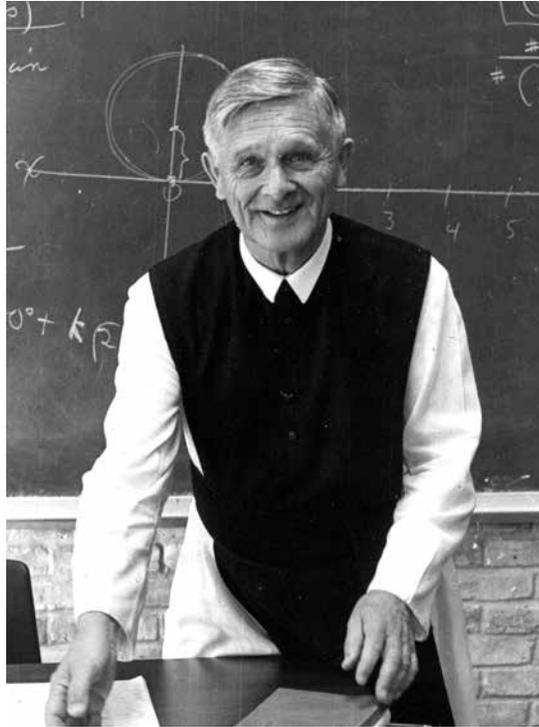
But the inconsistent standards caused problems for students and for teachers. A few students were passed when they should have failed. A few teachers were given new contracts when they should have been let go.

Parents saw that the revolving-door faculty was retarding their boys' chances of academic success. Results from a standardized high school entrance test in 1967 proved

disappointing. Time was of the essence. The first two classes had risen to high school now. The Class of '70 was just two short years away from applying to colleges. The reputation of the school hung in the balance.

Parents and monks alike were beginning to feel that Fr. Damian, while a wonderful person to launch the school, was not the person to manage, improve, and expand the ongoing enterprise.

A number of monks in the abbey also expressed their frustrations with the school's inability to operate profitably. It appeared to be a financial black hole, they insisted. At the current rate, they extrapolated, the



Fr. Placid Csizmazia, a hero of the Cistercian Order's underground network in Hungary during the fifties, came to Irving in the mid-sixties and served as assistant headmaster.

abbey would go bankrupt in a decade. The prep school could very well eat up the monks' savings and rob it of the funds to develop facilities or vocations.

With the stakes so high, the abbot stepped in decisively.

Abbot Anselm appointed Fr. Placid Csizmazia, who had recently arrived from Hungary, as assistant headmaster to assist with refining the curriculum and preparing for the accreditation process by the Texas Education Agency.

Then he formalized relationships with those people he had trusted all along. He named Bill Bret, Pat Haggerty, Dr. Louis Johnston, and Bryan Smith to the Board of Advisors (later re-named the School Board). It also included four monks: Fr. Christopher, Fr. Benedict, Fr. Placid, and *ex officio* Fr. Damian. The abbot served as president of the board.

Following the recommendation of Abbot Anselm and Fr. Damian, the board also named Fr. Denis to the newly created position of college counselor. Fr. Denis had impressed members of the board as someone whom they could trust with this important job. Though some found him difficult to work with, his performance was outstanding. As a form master, he managed his boys effortlessly, helping them to produce the highest grade-point average of any class in the school. His teaching also continued to gain admirers, including Mr. and Mrs. Haggerty, whose son Michael '71 suddenly began to perform well in math under Fr. Denis' tutelage.

Citing health reasons, Fr. Damian tendered his

resignation as headmaster of Cistercian Prep School in November 1968. "He had burned out," said Jane Bret. Having steered the school through its infancy — providing it with direction, inspiration, and love — he was unwilling to subject himself and the school to any more criticism. It was not easy to give up a position that had given his interest in educational psychology meaning and had helped shape so many friendships in just six years. It must have been particularly difficult

since the boys he had admitted in 1962 were so close to maturing into the school's first graduates.

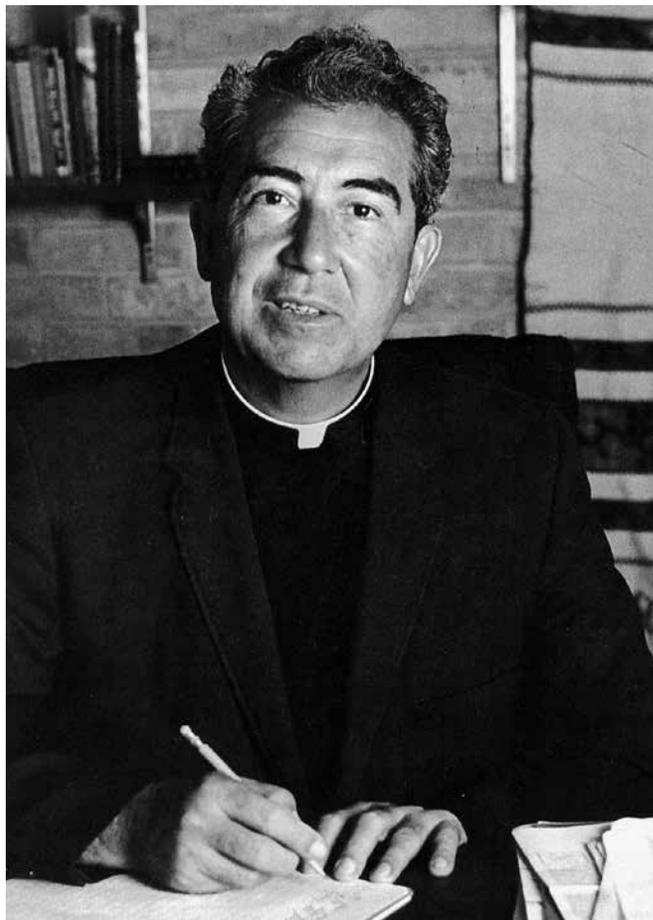
Abbot Anselm requested that Fr. Damian serve out the remainder of the 1968-69 school year while he considered his options. The two leading candidates were Fr. Placid, 54 years of age, and Fr. Denis, 32. Fr. Placid had been a hero of the Cistercian underground in Hungary during the fifties. He was an outstanding linguist. But he had arrived in America only a year before. His age also concerned school board members. In such a case, said Pat Haggerty, one should opt for the younger candidate. Fr. Denis and the abbot had never been close friends, but Abbot Anselm found the young priest to be industrious, intelligent, and decisive.

Whatever Fr. Denis did, he

did well. Abbot Anselm concurred with Haggerty.

"I was perceived as young, immature, and dangerous, that is, too aggressive," recalled Abbot Denis.

Nevertheless, Abbot Anselm realized that if the school was to achieve the kind of excellence the monks and parents envisioned, some strong medicine was needed. Fr. Denis was the one to administer it.



Fr. Damian stepped down after the 1968-69 school year. As founding headmaster, he had accomplished the difficult task of launching the school through its crucial first six years of growth and promise. He devoted the rest of his life to pursuing his talents as an artist.

Fr. Denis' appointment was greeted with a sigh of relief by many and a conviction that he would lead the school effectively. But others were angered.

The students in the first three classes — most of whom Fr. Damian had chauffeured home after their admissions test years before — felt saddened and betrayed.

“Speaking for myself,” said Ray Foley '70, “the animosity that we as a class displayed towards Fr. Denis probably came from a deep love and respect for Fr. Damian. It was certainly my own desire to graduate under Fr. Damian's tutelage.”

The differences between the two men also colored people's feelings.

“Fr. Damian was a big picture guy,” said Steve McAuliff. “He'd work the room like a politician. He had the perfect personality for establishing a school. He was creative and very sociable. But he tended to pass off details. Fr. Denis was extremely organized and regimented. One thing you knew about Denis, if he

praised you, you knew you'd done something right.”

“A lot of people perceived him to be a protector of his class (Class of '74),” McAuliff added. “He put them on a pedestal. He felt that they were the first real class, and the first four classes just kind of muddled their way through.”

Finally, Fr. Denis' attitude struck many as arrogant. “We felt that he thought he was smarter than everyone else,” McAuliff commented, “and he was probably right.”

“He would call it the way it was,” Fr. Peter Verhalen '73 remembered. Those whom Fr. Denis had offended found themselves blaming him for Fr. Damian's resignation.

But regardless of how anyone felt, a new headmaster would hand out the diplomas at the first graduation in May 1970. And the school would move forward, embracing Fr. Damian's vision while creating new promise for Cistercian Prep.

Chapter 3

Tough love — 1969 - 1981

The clickety-click of the school's noisy 16-millimeter film projector tapped time in the dark. Gathered in the old physics lab (the space directly across the hall from today's senior classrooms), Upper School students had spent the morning of October 15, 1969 discussing the Vietnam War protests. Now, rather unexpectedly, the boys had become engrossed by the images of another revolt, one captured in flickering black-and-white 14 years earlier.

The baby boomers had seen a lot of frantic newsreel footage in the late sixties. Television had brought home the growing carnage in Vietnam, the exploits of the Chicago Seven, the riots in Watts, the madness of Charles Manson, and the assassinations of Rev. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, to mention just a few.

This film jolted them just as much. Produced by

Time/Life, the documentary chronicled the violent chaos of the Hungarian Revolution of October 23 - November 4, 1956. These were the twelve days that had uprooted so many of their teachers. Soviet soldiers collided with Hungarian university students in guerrilla fighting along Budapest's elegant avenues. Men against boys. Tanks vs. handguns. Totalitarianism crushing democracy.

In the dark, 33-year-old Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy took the opportunity to relax and savor the disaster averted. The day before, things had looked pretty bleak.

In the afternoon, Tom Martin '70 had engaged Fr. Denis in a high-profile shouting match on the rights of students to protest the war. The debate was prompted by a nationwide moratorium planned for the next day at colleges and high schools. The event's organizers wanted students to halt "business as usual" for a day

to draw attention to the anti-war movement. Martin, who was headed for the Naval Academy and believed strongly in the war, passionately expressed his belief that students had the right to express their opinion. Fr. Denis threatened severe disciplinary action for anyone who missed school to participate in anti-war demonstrations.

That night, the young headmaster received an urgent phone call from Dr. Louis Johnston.

"The boys are trying to stage a boycott tomorrow," warned the school board member and father of sons Kevin Johnston '70 and Steve Johnston '71. "Fr. Denis, you must come up with a plan to keep them in school."

Fr. Denis reacted quickly. He called Monte Atkinson '70, Cistercian's first student government

Headmaster Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy addresses the Classes of '70, '71, and '72 on October 15, 1969, the day of a nationwide student moratorium in protest of the Vietnam War. They met in the old physics lab on the ground floor of the Upper School. Note the black arm bands worn by some of the students. UD professor Fr. Emilian Novák is seated to the left of Fr. Denis and Fr. Roch Kereszty is seated among the students in the middle column, second row.

president, who was spearheading the eleventh-hour boycott.

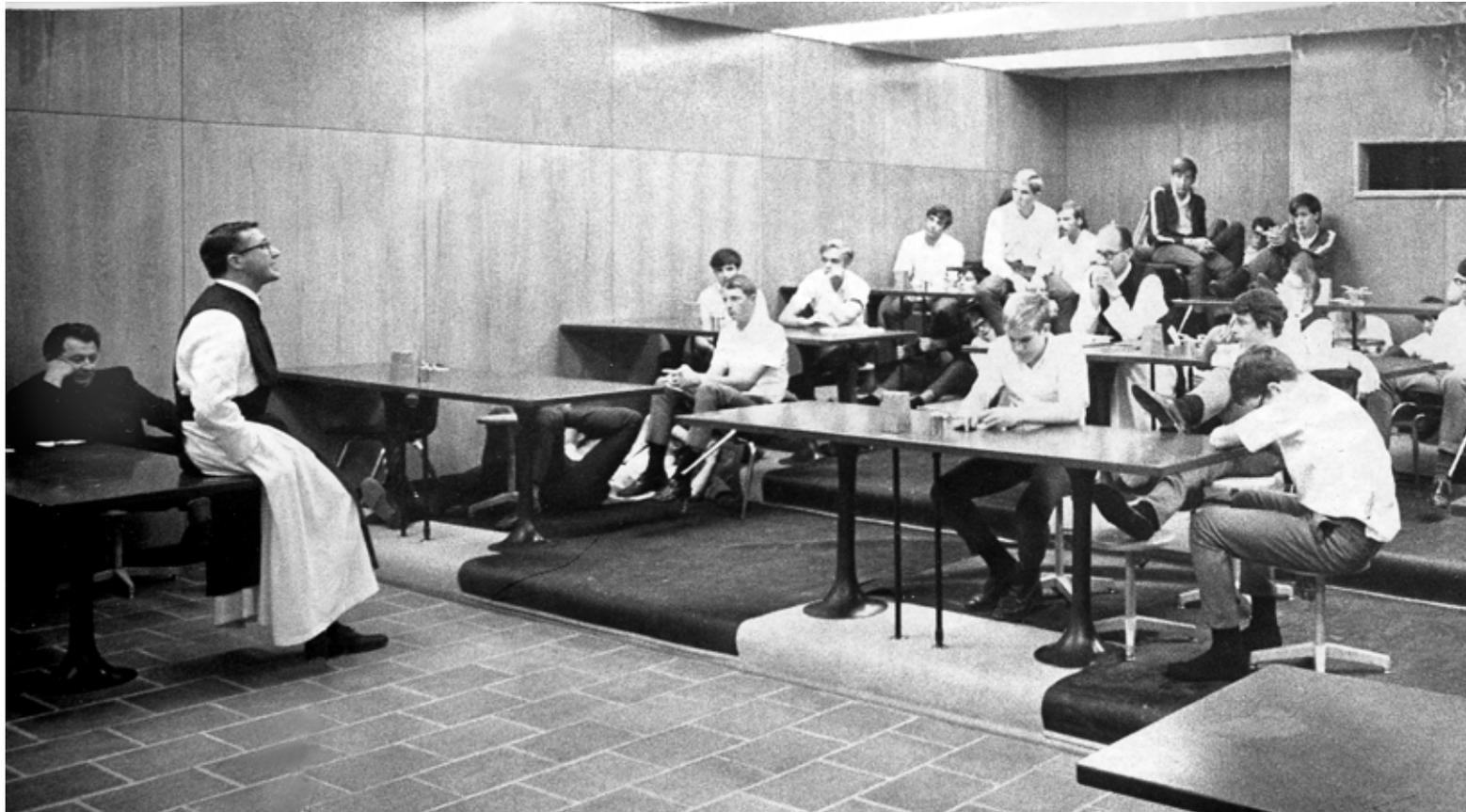
"Remember, Monte," Fr. Denis said, "It's the war you are protesting against, not the school. I have to enforce the rule against truancy if you do not show up tomorrow. But, if you come, we will cancel classes and hold a discussion on the war with invited speakers and participation by the faculty." Atkinson agreed.

Fr. Denis then notified the respective Form Masters of the plan and collared Fr. Emilian Novák, a Cistercian who was pursuing a doctorate in political science at UD.

"You are needed at the prep school in the morning," Fr. Denis explained.

Much to Fr. Denis' relief, everyone showed up the next day. The fact that several sported black armbands irritated him only mildly. "I ignored the armbands," Fr. Denis said. In the lab, students gave Fr. Denis a cool reception. Fr. Emilian delivered a one-hour presentation on the war and then led a discussion. When the boys grew restless after about an hour, the film projector was turned on and the documentary worked a kind of magic.

The violent images on the screen left many of the



jaded Americans with their mouths agape.

“The danger was palpable,” recalled Steve McAuliff ’71. Then out of the darkness a slim figure approached the screen and pointed at one of the Hungarian students.

“That one, the one with the glasses,” remarked Fr. Denis, “this is your headmaster.”

The comment was met with a uniform silence, except for the noisy film projector that suddenly sounded more like machine-gun fire.

“It left an impression,” said Jim Smith ’72.

“You had to respect the fact that he was there in the middle of the action. Fr. Denis gained a lot of credibility that day,” McAuliff emphasized.

Still, the students weren’t about to share their newfound appreciation with Fr. Denis.

This was, after all, a generation that had definite problems with authority. The Vietnam War, the Kent State shootings (in which four student protesters were killed by national guardsmen in Ohio), and then Watergate would lead to a decade in which authority on virtually all levels was constantly questioned.

Cistercian’s first three classes also had another problem with Fr. Denis (and the rest of the second

wave of Hungarian monks who were not present at the school’s founding).

“The first generation of students felt entitled,” explained Fr. Bernard. They assumed the role of “the ‘owners’ of the school.” Anybody outside of the original circle of teachers “was an intruder who had to be taught ‘how we do things around here.’”

For them, Fr. Damian would be a hard act to follow.

As seen from atop the Petroleum Club the city’s lights could be mesmerizing. Pat and Bea Haggerty had invited Fr. Denis to the exclusive club one summer evening in 1969 to discuss the young headmaster’s first major decision. Within a week of assuming his new post, Fr. Denis had boldly decided to eliminate Pre-Form (or fourth grade).

He felt a nine-year program was too long while the school’s enrollment was too thin (too few students in each class). He also pointed out there was little accomplished in Pre-Form that was consequential for Form I. Besides, there was enough to do without the burden of testing and admitting a whole new class.

“Okay,” consented Pat Haggerty as he pulled his car up to his house. “But take care with these kinds of decisions.”

As the school’s most high-profile benefactors, Pat and Bea Haggerty occupied a unique position at Cistercian, yet Fr. Denis was surprised that they felt he needed their consent for this kind of a decision.

On the other hand, it is very likely that the Haggerty’s were astonished at the self-assured decisiveness of their dinner companion. They also must have surmised that the social graces that Fr. Damian had enjoyed — fine dinners, trips to Fish Creek, and weekends in the Bahamas — would be wasted on Fr. Denis.

Another formidable group of parents tested the young headmaster in September 1969.

By the looks on their faces, the delegation of four dads had come on a very serious mission. Messrs. Coyle, Pritchett, and Sullivan (all fathers of seniors) strode into the headmaster’s office along with Jake O’Connor (father of Dennis O’Connor ’73, who built and oversaw the maintenance of the football field).

They had come to voice their feelings over the high school football program, which was just preparing for



its third game.

Everyone in the room was painfully aware that the experienced and talented Coach Ron Taliaferro (who had assembled Cistercian's first varsity squad in the spring) had quit unexpectedly on August 1. Forced to scramble to find a replacement just a few days before practices were to begin, Fr. Denis had discovered a 21-year-old named Bill Coombes through a Dallas YMCA director.

The dads wanted to share their serious concerns about the young coach's inexperience. They proposed hiring a line coach to help him. They were prepared to select the individual and pay him out of their own pockets. The young headmaster listened carefully before responding.

"Look," Fr. Denis said. "I have hired Coach Coombes and it is very clear to me that he should be in charge. You may be right that we need a line coach. But the school will pay his salary and Coach Coombes will hire him. It is crucial that the team have a united leadership."

The gentlemen begrudgingly expressed their support for the headmaster's plan. Jake O'Connor lingered for a moment.

"You did the right thing," he said. As he departed, he turned back and smiled, perhaps surprised at Fr. Denis' firm backbone.

Fr. Denis leaned forward to check that the men had disappeared down the hall. Then he picked up the phone to ring Fr. Bernard.

"What's a line coach?" he asked.

"Thirty-three is in our religion the right age for being crucified," Fr. Denis said, divulging his age to new English teacher Stephen Housewright on a walk from the abbey to the school in 1969. While making

light of his battered state, Fr. Denis was acknowledging that the burden of the transition was weighing heavily on him.

"He often looked like a man who had been banished to the prairie," said Jim Smith, "like a man who had been sentenced to some punishment he didn't understand."

"There was never any question about my call to obedience," Fr. Denis recalled. "Dreams and plans don't matter. The community's need is the most important thing and that's what your superior tells you."

Fr. Denis' dreams had been trampled on more than once before. When he applied to study French literature at the university in Hungary, the communist regime enrolled him in law school. When, as a 26-year-old he sought to pursue a French degree in order to teach it at the prep school, Abbot Anselm suggested he earn a master's degree in mathematics.

Each time, he poured himself into the task at hand (e.g., it took him just two years to complete a bachelor's and a master's in math at TCU).

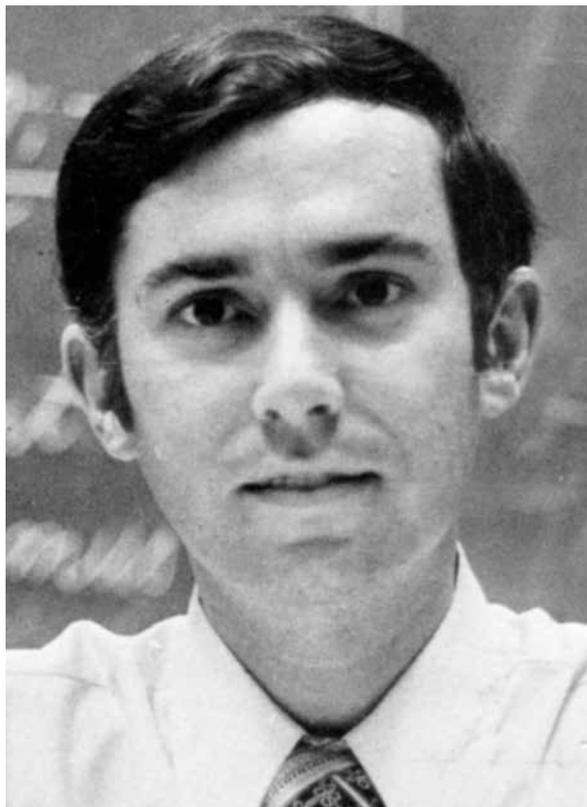
As headmaster, moments of serenity were few.

"I passed Fr. Denis' office late one afternoon during the final exam period of the fall semester of 1969 and heard the *Dies Irae* from Mozart's *Requiem* on his stereo," remembered Housewright, who then poked his head through the door.

"I always play that when I grade papers," smiled Fr. Denis.

He fought through the tension and the long days of work (usually from 7:30 in the morning to 10:30 at night), giving everything to the job. "He would have made a tremendous Marine," Tom Martin '70 reflected. "He has a great sense of duty."

During that first year, he tackled a long list of



Stephen Housewright arrived in the fall of 1969 and helped to stabilize what had been a shaky English department. He remained until 1980, when he was replaced by Tom Pruitt.



At the May 1970 commencement, the new headmaster, Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, (left) and the old headmaster, Fr. Damian Szödényi (right) sat on either side of Abbot Anselm Nagy. The event was staged in the lunchroom.

urgent objectives. A billing system was implemented to improve the school's ability to collect tuitions. Admissions testing was modified and streamlined, placing the emphasis on achievement rather than IQ. (The individually administered IQ tests had taken one hour per applicant; the new method took one-half hour for an entire group of applicants.) Rules for hiring and firing were established. Due process was integrated into the disciplinary procedures. The curriculum was modified and formalized. A new practice field (the Upper Field) was added for football and soccer.

As college counselor, Fr. Denis traveled frequently to introduce the school to college admissions officers around the country and to dispel the perception that Cistercian was a "white flight" school.

As form master of Class of '74, Fr. Denis struggled with that group's most tempestuous year, Form IV.

To boost the school's image in mathematics, he put the top math students from Forms VII and VIII in one classroom and taught them simultaneously (alternately teaching one group while the other worked

on problems). Fr. Denis taught the four Form VIII students calculus. ("I breezed through first year calculus at Rice University due to my superb instruction from Fr. Denis," said Tim Johnson '70.)

Nevertheless, between Fr. Damian's final year and the end of Fr. Denis' first year, a larger than expected number of families chose to send their boys elsewhere. Some could be attributed in hindsight to attrition; they were going to move on anyway. But many left for philosophical reasons, either in protest of Fr. Damian's failings, his firing, the hiring of his young replacement, or his new policies (which did not include paying close attention to the suggestions of parents). The fractures in the school community exhibited themselves at the Commencement 1970.

At Cistercian's first graduation, Fr. Damian and Fr. Denis sat on either side of Abbot Anselm on the makeshift stage in the lunchroom. In one speech, master of ceremonies Monte Atkinson spoke passionately of Fr. Damian's vision for the school. In another, valedictorian Tom Martin saluted Fr.

Denis's contributions to Cistercian. The emotional undercurrent took a toll on everyone. For many in the Class of '70, decades would pass before their feelings for the school were mended.

For Fr. Denis, the strain bubbled up in another form. Hours after attending a year-end school board meeting the day after graduation, he lay in a hospital bed at St. Paul Hospital, exhausted and suffering from kidney stones.

Atop the first homespun edition of *The Informer* in March 1971, the headline proclaimed, "Construction on gym to begin next month." The announcement was big news. (The first basketball teams practiced and played home games at the University of Dallas.)

During 1964, the monks had visited the construction site of the school daily, hoping to will the building out of the ground. Now it was the students' turn. They couldn't wait to have a gym to call their own.

Fr. Denis, in an effort to streamline the design process, announced his intention to hire an architect named Al Salem for the project. Board members Pat Haggerty was unhappy with the choice. How would the new building fit in with O'Neil Ford's beautifully designed buildings?

"The decision to hire another architect for the gym was an evolutionary thing," reflected Haggerty's fellow

T.I. executive Bryan Smith years later. "There were budgetary considerations. Personally, I felt that a gym wouldn't require Ford's talents anyway."

Fr. Denis' decision to select his own architect demonstrated his intention to take charge of the design process, expedite it, and keep the costs down. It also

demonstrated to the founding parents that Fr. Denis was not inclined to follow the parents' lead as Fr. Damian had been. The school would grow, from this point, according to the monks' vision, not the parents'.

The gym project grew quickly as the founding fundraisers, working on their last of three major projects for the school, began to consider the possibility that the building might have to serve also as the school's auditorium, theater, and stage. The budget grew from \$400,000 to \$750,000.

"[The old gym] is a product of its time," commented David Dillon, architectural critic of *The Dallas Morning News*. "It's part of the biography of the campus."

It reflected the hard-bitten realities as they were understood by the school's young

headmaster. Fr. Denis knew the function of the facility was most important. It would relate to the first two structures by using the same brick. On November 18, 1972, Cistercian celebrated its tenth anniversary by dedicating its new asset. Applications soared the



Architect Al Salem (shown here in 2003) was selected by Fr. Denis over O'Neil Ford to design the school's gymnasium in 1971. The practical-minded decision signalled that the young headmaster was capable and determined to make the important decisions without consulting the founding parents.

following year.

As the gym began to emerge from the ground during the 1971-72 school year, a new Cistercian arose — one more consumed with the present than the past. With the graduation of the Class of 1970 and '71, the emotional issues related to Fr. Damian subsided. While problems persisted (and the gym caused a great deal of tension in the abbey), they were no longer tied to Fr. Damian's resignation.

One of those problems was described in "Cistercian Syndrome," a story that appeared anonymously in the January 1972 edition of *The Informer*. In it, the author (Robert Salgo '73) confessed that in his first few years at Cistercian, he did not fit in because he refused to "submit to the ideal behavior set up by the Cistercian elite." Ostracized, he began "to doubt [his] personal value."

Salgo told how he slowly "became part of the family." He wondered why. Had he changed or had the standards been lowered?

"That's the game I still play," he wrote. "I am involved with myself trying to reestablish my personal worth as a human being in relation to other people."

Every adolescent faces this dilemma to one degree or another. Cistercian students in those days, however, faced a double dose of insecurity since they were attending a new school with a strange name far from their neighborhoods. The school's reputation was misrepresented almost as often as its name was mispronounced. ("I met a girl who thought Cistercian was for kids with special needs," George Susat '74 recalled.)

Salgo determined that he would tackle his problem head-on, without the help of a parent, teacher, or

administrator.

"A close look at my problem and its ramifications is in order; and through the writing of this confession, this has been fulfilled," he concluded. "I am stable."

The story sparked a great deal of discussion at the school. Some believed it to be an indictment of Cistercian.

"I think the same could have been written about any private school," Salgo reflected recently. "I wanted to write about breaking out of that mold of 'What do others think of me?' that can be so difficult when you're an adolescent."

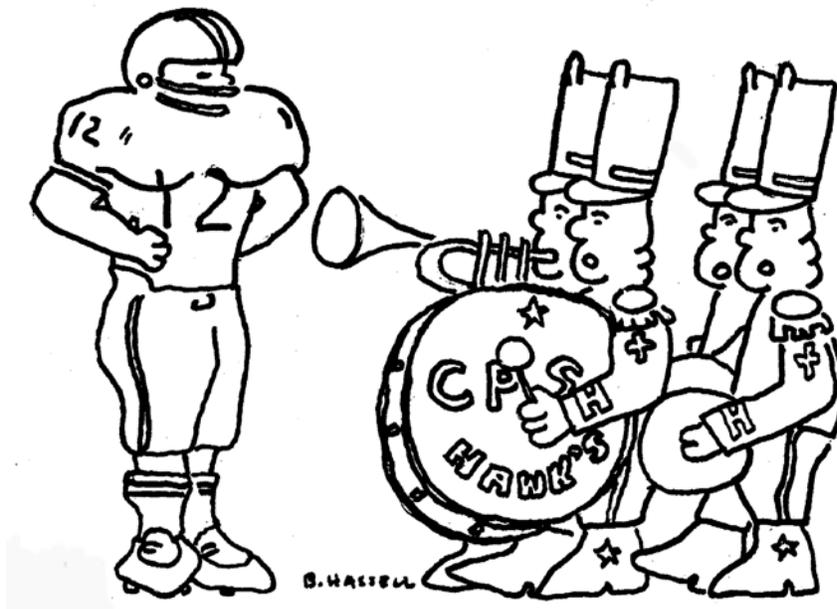
Cistercian syndrome quickly came to serve as a buzzword for the school's inferiority complex, what some perceived as a loser's attitude in sports.

"Right now," suggested sports columnist Peter Smith '74 in the March 1972 edition of *The Informer*, "the most provocative question on everyone's mind is: Can the new [gym] cure the losing tradition at Cistercian?" Perhaps, he wrote, "but what about the Cistercian syndrome?"

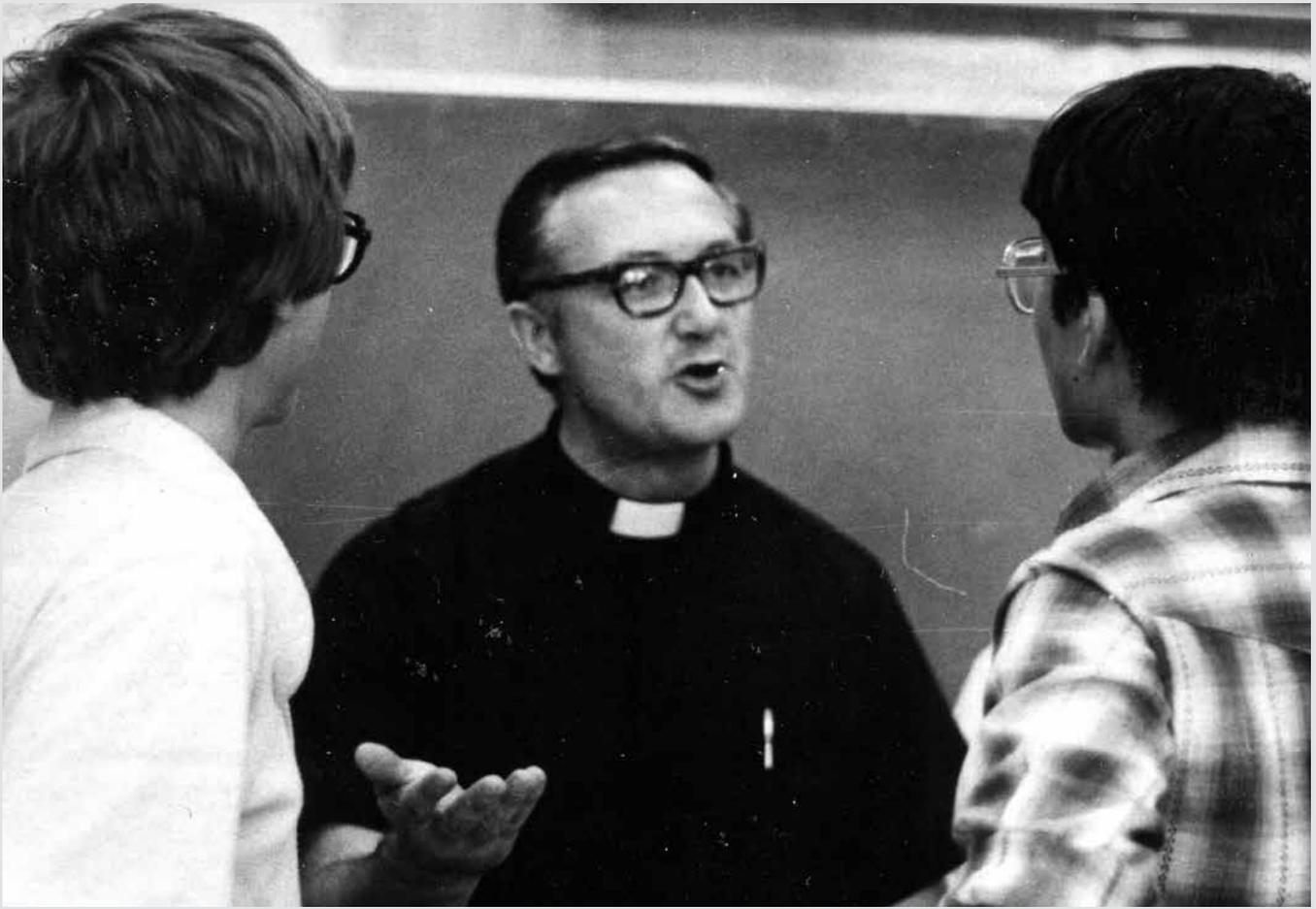
Coaches Bob

Patrizi, Bill Coombes, and Bob Haaser replied via a letter to the editor in April, "The Cistercian syndrome is a bunch of horsie-stuff. Gymnasiums don't come equipped with traditions. People make traditions." (Time doesn't hurt either.)

In fact, traditions already were popping up all around the school. *The Informer* itself became a tradition just as Exodus had before it. Frequent literary and artistic contributions in *The Informer* spawned the school's first attempt at a literary magazine in 1974. The student government established off-campus lunch privileges. Then sparked by a couple of letters to the



The cartoon by Billy Hassell '74 published in the December 1972 edition of *The Informer* was entitled, "No marching band for CPS." It echoed the sentiments of Gary Lucido's manifesto on Cistercian's atypical nature.



Fr. Denis helped Mark Talkington '79 parlay good grades and athletic talent into a scholarship at Stanford University.

Piecing events together years later

"What's Fr. Denis busting me for now?" wondered Mark Talkington '79 when he was called out of class in the spring of his senior year. As he arrived at the Headmaster's Office, Fr. Denis was holding the phone smiling.

"Harvard is on the line," Fr. Denis said. The talented soccer player had applied to Columbia, Harvard, and Stanford. He had been accepted at all three but did not have a clue how he was going to pay the tuition. Then Stanford offered a package that included a full-ride plus a partial athletic scholarship.

"I was sure that Fr. Denis had used his influence with Stanford's admissions office to create a financial aid package for me," he said.

Now here was a Harvard admissions officer offering Talkington a package that matched Stanford's package along with a little sales pitch.

"I was overwhelmed," he said. "So Fr. Denis calmly grabbed the phone and politely told Harvard that I would respond soon.

"The next day," Talkington remembered, "I received a call from Columbia at home and they offered me a package."

"It never occurred to me for several years as to why Harvard just happened to have called Fr. Denis during the school day. He never mentioned his involvement and let me go off thinking that I had accomplished everything on my own. After a few years of piecing the events together, I concluded that Fr. Denis was responsible for obtaining the scholarships and financial aid for me so that I could attend the school of my choice."

"Like so many of the priests at Cistercian," Talkington added. "Fr. Denis is humble and unselfish, a man who measures himself on the success and growth of the boys and men he has taught and guided."

editor in *The Informer*, the student body elected its first set of cheerleaders in the spring of '72. (Matney Faulkner, aunt of Alec Kemp '03 and Patrick Kemp '10, served as head cheerleader that first year.) By the next fall, in front of their cheerleaders and brand new bleachers, a winning football tradition was forged when the Hawks won a hard-fought 24-20 victory over powerful Dallas Christian, a team they had never defeated. The school seemed to be throwing the monkey off its back. A winning tradition was being born.

Gary Lucido '73 issued a warning in the October 1972 edition of *The Informer* in a story entitled, "Marching Band for CPS."

He suggested that "the sudden and almost unbelievable appearance of a wire fence around our [football] field" was an abomination. "The team is made totally inaccessible to those who come to support them. It is already a step in the wrong direction."

"I [am] proud of being a Cistercian student. I'd like to continue to be proud," he wrote. "I don't want to see Cistercian transformed into a disgustingly typical high school."

Lucido's manifesto proudly declared there was innate value in Cistercian's quirkiness. Perhaps the school's differences should be celebrated and preserved for future generations of Cistercian students. The pride and joy of being a Cistercian student was back after suffering from the hangover from Fr. Damian's resignation. And it was stronger than ever.



Clockwise from top left: Ronnie Sheppard, AP English, Frances Hassell, school secretary, Fr. Thomas Fehér, geography, Fr. Aloysius Kimecz, Spanish.

It was fitting that members of the Class of '73 — Salgo and Lucido — played key roles in this pivotal change in the school's psyche. The Class of '73 had spent the first half of Pre-Form on Walnut Hill Lane and the second half in Irving. The school's largest class had suffered through a string of form masters until Fr. Roch began to lead them as sophomores. Rooted in the school's past, this class would produce Cistercian's

fourth headmaster, one who would lead the institution into the 21st century.

"The Class of '73 included some top minds," recalled Abbot Denis. "I was also there for those who had difficulties, and they appreciated that. Many in the Class of '73 and the whole of the Class of '74 gave so much support for the new directions of the school. That is how we turned the corner."

Even the student government developed an easy relationship with the headmaster.

"I remember after the election being concerned about my ability to work with [Fr. Denis] as headmaster," said Tom Lewis '73 who became the fourth president of the student government. "We met one-on-one soon

thereafter and then I began to understand why the guys in the Class of '74 were so fond of this 'tough guy.' He was respectful of my new position and encouraged me to lead in a manner that was responsive to my fellow students and responsible to the school."

"Much to my amazement," Lewis remarked, "he challenged me to push for more student responsibilities and freedoms. As a result, the administration and student government became partners and a number of

changes were made to uniforms, the student lounge, off-campus lunch privileges, a spring concert, Earth Day activities, week-end socials, intramural sports, and a variety of student initiatives.”

“And perhaps most importantly, a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect between students and ‘the establishment’ evolved from what had been combative lows in the late sixties and early seventies.”

“On a personal level,” Lewis added, “I learned that what I had previously seen as tough was actually tough love and much more love than tough.”

“Okay, we have accomplished something,” Fr. Denis remembered feeling in 1974. “Now when we sell our students and our school, we can say, ‘This is our product.’”

An outstanding faculty shaped this product. All the holes of the sixties had been systematically plugged and few weaknesses remained.

The English department, which had suffered from turnover and a lack of leadership for six years, began to establish itself upon the arrival of Stephen Housewright.

“Things began to fall into place, and the counsel, good example, and firm leadership of Fr. Denis had a lot to do with it,” Housewright remembered. “We all got busy, both faculty and students, putting our energy into teaching and learning and leaving personality conflicts and ‘political’ turmoil behind.”

“And work we did,” Housewright insisted. “Above all, that is what I remember.”

“I think I was the kind of teacher good students love to hate — at least I hope I was,” he said. “But as hard as I drove them, I drove myself even harder, and most of them could see that.”

The disciplinary problems of the early years were tamed one way or the other.

“One day I begged Fr. Denis, ‘Please sit in my

classes so I could be able to teach something,’” remembered Fr. Roch. “Alone I am unable to control the class; they shout and yell and misbehave and I am reduced to nothing.”

“If I were to do that,” Fr. Denis replied, “it would take away even your remaining authority. You have to fight it out alone.”

“So I resigned myself to the impossible,” remembered Fr. Roch, “and gradually the situation changed.”

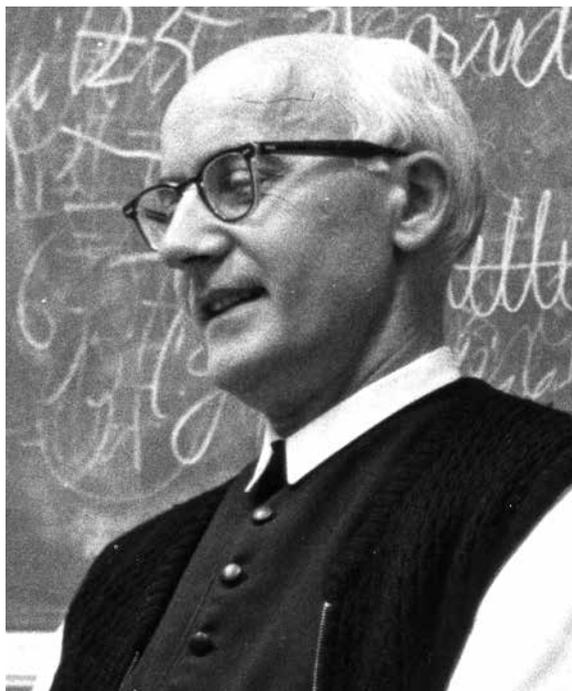
John Daughety ’79 recalled “Mr. Hall staring at, and talking to, the top left corner of the classroom, especially when he was angry. Mr. Parks scaring the hell out of us, walking around the classroom tapping his meter stick on his boot, and hearing the smallest whisper from the other side of the classroom. Mr. Housewright teaching us literary criticism as if our verbal score on the SAT really mattered.”

Then there were the priests, including “Fr. Thomas, so willing to share stories of his experiences in occupied Hungary in addition to teaching Geography. And Fr. Melchior, with recitation in Form II, nailing us with chalk from across the room if he caught us drifting.

“I am sure I am missing a few,” Daughety added, “but

the point is that this was a collection of very different, very unique personalities who were masterful educators. When we graduated from Cistercian, we knew how to think, and we were never intimidated by what we did not understand; we could think our way through any problems.”

In five years at the prep school, Fr. Denis had overcome significant obstacles to put the school on a winning track. His relentless efforts to pursue the lofty standards of the founders had won him support from parents, students, and faculty. But in February 1974,



Fr. Henry Marton agreed to serve as headmaster for one year, the 1974-75 school year, after Fr. Denis stepped down in May 1974.

just as the school was “turning the corner,” he ran into trouble in the monastery. The issues within the abbey, which are covered in detail in Part Three of this book, prompted the 37-year-old headmaster to announce that he would not return as headmaster the following year.

Some in the abbey termed his departure a sabbatical, but no return was scheduled. Fr. Denis would pursue studies in Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

Abbot Anselm appointed Fr. Henry Marton to serve as headmaster, but Fr. Henry agreed to serve for only one year. He was aided by his brother, Fr. Bernard Marton, who continued to serve as assistant headmaster as he had since 1971.

By January 1975, divisions had grown so deep within the abbey that Abbot Anselm resigned after losing a vote of confidence. Fr. Christopher Rábay was elected prior administrator until a second election, scheduled for April 1976. (Abbot Anselm would be reelected to a six-year term at that time.)

The turmoil at the abbey created some problems for the school as well.

“There were rumblings, especially among the lay faculty,” remembered Fr. Bernard of that year. “Some wanted to take advantage while Fr. Denis was gone.” In fact, a few lay teachers sensed a power vacuum and attempted to fill it. Others submitted proposals to transform the school, ranging from the curriculum, discipline, and admissions to hiring, firing, and benefits.

At the same time, the oil crisis of 1973-75 — and the subsequent inflation, stock market crash, and economic slowdown — hit the school’s bottom line hard. By May, Fr. Christopher realized he could no longer allow the problems at the school to continue.

“Would you consider returning to run the school in the fall?” he asked in a letter that found Fr. Denis in Jerusalem.

Fr. Denis replied quickly and excitedly, “I need to come back immediately. I want to catch everyone before the school year closes. Otherwise, I cannot begin to organize things for next year.”

Within a week, Fr. Denis had arrived back in Dallas. As in 1969, he found the school reeling and in debt. But this time, things would be different. Upon his return in May 1975, Fr. Denis sensed a fresh new appreciation for the talents he brought to the job of headmaster. “I learned that people were alarmed by the confusion at the school while I was away,” he said. For the first time, he felt needed and supported both by the

school community and by his brothers in the abbey.

“Now,” he thought, “I know this is my calling.” It was a brand new feeling for Fr. Denis. And he had a surprise for them.

“When Fr. Denis came back,” recalled Bryan Smith, “he was not passive or submissive by any means, but he was more tolerant. He was willing to talk to people.”

He undertook the challenges of the headmaster’s office with a new optimism and fervor. The year away seemed to have done everyone a lot of good.

The following spring, Fr. Anselm was re-elected abbot and two novices, Br. Peter Verhalen ’73 and Br. Gregory Schweers, joined the monastery. Many of the complex issues of the monastery remained

unsolved, but the community recognized that it was time to move forward. They also realized that, although far from perfect, Abbot Anselm and Fr. Denis were leaders who were working for the common good.

Good news also arrived from UD where, in 1975, Bryan Smith had been named chancellor of the university. In the course of a comprehensive salary review the next year, Smith saw “terrible inequities in the way the salaries were structured.” The Dominicans, Cistercians, and nuns were being paid “peanuts.” He increased the salaries of the religious, bringing their



Bryan F. Smith, who made Cistercian one of his life’s works, believed that Fr. Denis would return from his studies in Rome as a more effective communicator and leader. Smith’s knowledge and expertise with succession plans paid dividends for Cistercian over the decades.

compensation levels close to that of the lay faculty.

At the school, Fr. Denis was trying to find a way to make the school's curriculum financially viable.

Fr. Damian Szödényi had crafted a program designed to offer a robust curriculum that satisfied the requirements of any "Sputnik" school, a healthy dose of math and science. The resulting curriculum offered each class of approximately 20 students a broad range of subjects, including two languages in Middle School (Spanish or French and Latin).

The ambitious offerings (and subsequently large faculty) were taxing the school. Fr. Denis began to



Football players from the Class of '81 had seen tough times as underclassmen. But as seniors, they triumphed with 8-2 record and TISC title. As their form master, Fr. Denis awaited the result of their final game against Greenhill in his hospital bed.

think of ways to cut the program and to increase the number of students so that the school could operate profitably.

"It was a problem of linear programming," Abbot Denis recollected. "We needed parallel classes (i.e., two sections of approximately twenty boys each) in order to employ our faculty members fully, to make use of our facilities efficiently, and to schedule seven class periods a day." Parallel classes made teachers more efficient by allowing them to teach two classes (i.e., the same material to two sections) from only one class preparation.

In 1976, Fr. Denis decided to take a stab at expansion. He added a second section to Form III, a form for which there was always an abundance of

applicants. To make room for the new students, a new lunchroom was constructed on the ground level between the Middle and Upper Schools (courtesy of an \$80,000 donation from Bryan Smith). The library was moved into the space vacated by the lunchroom and classrooms were added in the old library location.

But adding so many students in Form III created academic, scheduling, and social problems. By 1980, when they entered their sophomore year, most of the newcomers had left and the Class of '82 was reduced once again to a single section. Expansion would have to wait a few years.

The whooping and hollering shook the walls of the visitors' locker room at Greenhill. Inside, red-faced smiles, pumping fists, loud hugs, and sweaty high fives ruled. Members of the Class of '81 heaped praise on one another, basked in the glow of their heroics, and savored their last glorious moments as Cistercian football players.

The Hawks had just demolished their rival, 36-6, and earned the school's first TISC (Texas Independent Schools Conference) crown. This victory capped an 8-2 season, the finest record in Cistercian's eleven-year football history. For the

seniors, this grand moment was made all the more special by the lean times, when they had been called on to uphold Cistercian's honor as freshmen and sophomores. It hadn't been pretty.

Some of those humiliating defeats motivated the Hawks during this unforgettable season. "I've never seen a group come into a season so ready to play," said Coach Bob Haaser. (The seniors were particularly motivated to shut out Greenhill this night, but the starters were persuaded to sit down in the fourth quarter and the Hornets scored on their last drive of the game.)

Fr. Denis, the form master of the Class of '81, was lying in a hospital bed at St. Paul's Hospital. He had refused pain medicine so he could stay up to learn the

score of the big game. Several nights before he had undergone back surgery (his third, and second since taking over as headmaster). Doctors had fused together vertebrae L4 and L5 and removed scar tissue and spurs that were irritating the surrounding nerves.

At around 10:30 that night, his umpteenth call to the coach's office in the Cistercian gym was finally answered by Coach Haaser, who had just stepped off the bus from Greenhill. The coach delivered the good news. Fr. Denis then spoke with several of the team's captains and rejoiced with his boys over their success. They had overcome difficult losing seasons as underclassmen and finally succeeded at what was so important to them. They were going out as winners.

Since his most recent surgery, Fr. Denis had been

thinking about the obstacles he had overcome as headmaster (and as form master of a graduating class). He wondered how he might go out a winner. The months of pain and cortisone shots prior to the surgery had taken their toll. Although only 45 years old, Fr. Denis felt beaten down.

"After the surgery, I felt it was time for me to resign," Abbot Denis remembered. "Fr. Bernard could enjoy being headmaster so much more than I could.

"The job had aged me," he said. "I didn't want it to kill me. I thought it was wrong to expect me to be headmaster until I failed. Why not leave while I was ahead of the game?"

Chapter 4

Road to stability — 1981 - 1996

Not long after assuming the office of headmaster in June 1981, Fr. Bernard received some sage advice from Bryan Smith. The school's venerable board member and father of five Cistercian graduates had studied succession in organizations for years. He knew that following a very successful leader like Fr. Denis posed special difficulties. The complications of this particular succession, however, appeared to zip right off the charts for another reason: the former leader was not going anywhere. Fr. Denis would continue to teach at Cistercian, and he was not the type to sit by idly if things weren't going well.

"Just don't screw it up," Smith counseled, half grinning, half growling. Knowing the difficult tasks ahead, Smith didn't want Fr. Bernard to take them lightly. He also wanted to challenge the 40-year-old headmaster.

"I was new to the job and still a little naïve," Fr. Bernard acknowledged. "I took his advice personally."

In some respects, Cistercian was running smoothly. But financially, the school remained on shaky ground. "I don't care about your budget," Abbot Anselm had warned Fr. Bernard in 1981, "but the monastery is not going to subsidize the school." The financial concerns could be traced directly to the need for more students and more tuitions.

While a 1976 attempt at expansion had failed, Fr. Bernard began to understand the dynamics involved in expanding the student body. Quick fixes would not do. Students entering after Form II had a difficult time catching up academically; only highly qualified students could be expected to meet such a challenge. They also realized that a form's sense of community was difficult to foster when large numbers were added

after Form II. Growth would have to start at Form I and slowly work its way up through all eight forms.

When complete, the expansion would help the school achieve financial stability. Only then could the school begin to pay the monks more than a pittance for their teaching services. Only then, would Abbot Anselm's decision to operate a prep school be vindicated within the monastery.

Expanding the school, however, would entail solving many difficult problems, like how to drum up more applicants, how to staff the growing enterprise, and where to teach the new students when they arrived.

That's where Fr. Bernard would shine.

"Right from the beginning, I knew that I would be headmaster one day," Fr. Bernard said, reflecting on September 7, 1962, the last day of his novitiate

At the Christmas 1981 Ring Ceremony, Abbot Anselm Nagy presents Jay Hartnett '83 with his senior ring. The abbot is flanked by new headmaster Fr. Bernard and Fr. Aurel Mensáros (form master of the Class of '83).

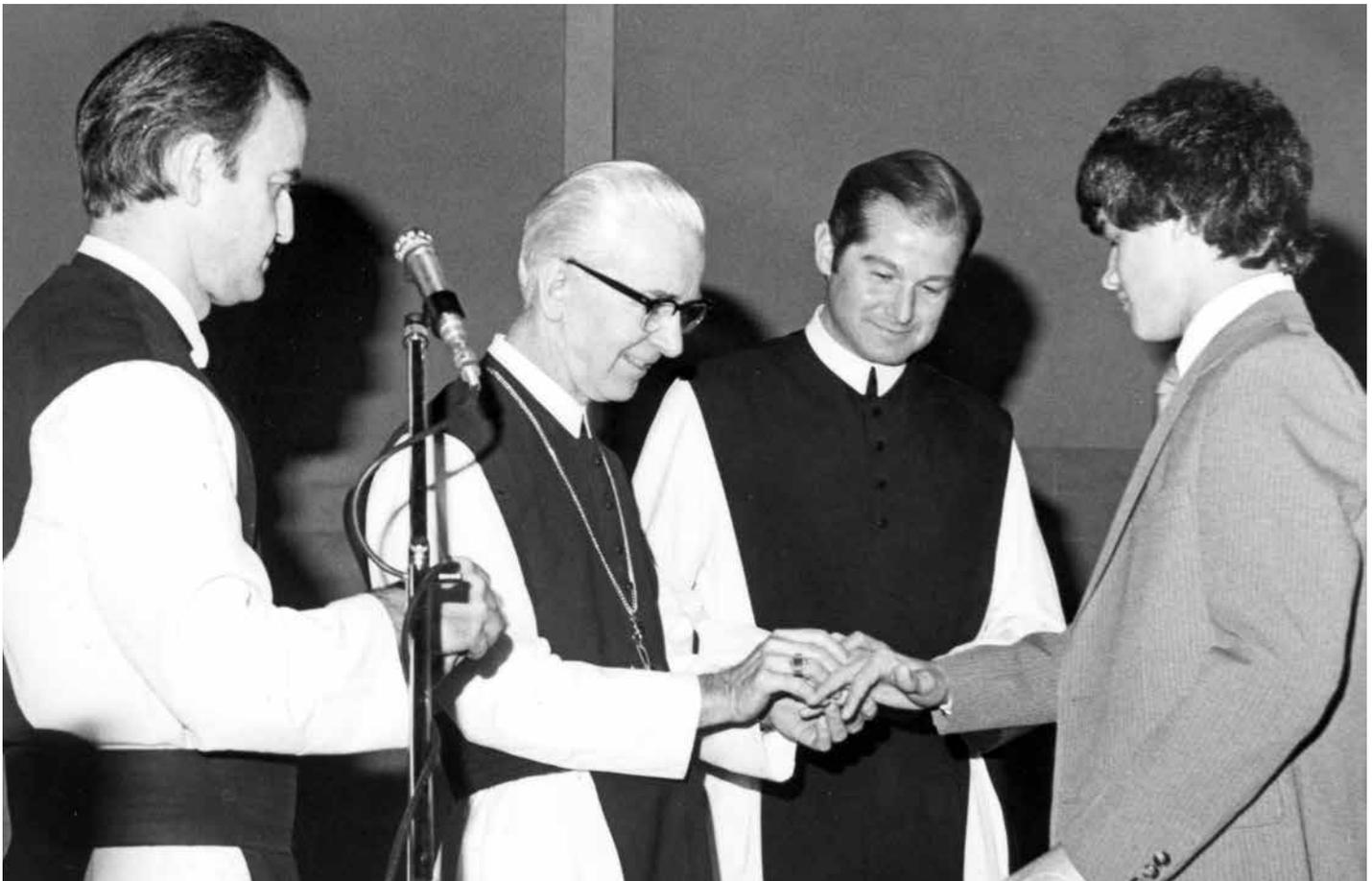
and the first day of school for Cistercian Prep. The next day, Br. Bernard took his first vows.

In the fall of 1968, Fr. Bernard was assigned by Abbot Anselm to serve as the form master of the Class of 1977, the school's final pre-formers, or fourth graders. (Fr. Denis would eliminate that grade in one of his first acts as headmaster in June 1969.)

To his roles as French teacher, form master, and assistant headmaster (which he was named in 1971), Fr. Bernard brought razor sharp disciplinary instincts. He had, after all, a distinct advantage over his Hungarian brethren.

After escaping Hungary at age 15, he attended Irving High School while living with his first foster family. It couldn't have been easy for the young Hungarian refugee who was still learning English. But the experience honed his senses. Then it was on to his second foster family in Dallas and Jesuit where he earned his high school diploma. He worked at the Tom Thumb on Lemmon and Lomo Alto.

Fr. Bernard's teenage experiences in America equipped him to decipher the machinations of US teenagers effortlessly.



“Most of the Hungarians didn’t understand American adolescents,” commented Paul Tomaso ’80, “Fr. Bernard did. He had been one. So you couldn’t pull the wool over his eyes. He was street smart.”

Appearing in a classroom doorway with his hands on his hips, Fr. Bernard would lift his nose in the air. “I smell gum,” Fr. Bernard would intone severely. “Of course, anyone who was chewing gum swallowed it immediately,” remembered David Frutos ’88. “Boy, you just didn’t want to cross Fr. Bernard.”

In the early eighties, during Fr. Bernard’s tenure as headmaster, corporal punishment came to an end. Although behavior problems did not cease, he seemed to forestall a lot of them.

“He had an uncanny knack for sniffing out any plot,” Tom Stimson ’78 insisted. “In fact, many of my classmates noted that if we gathered in a group of three or more that Fr. Bernard would soon appear. Sporting his characteristic Cheshire-cat grin he would bop up, grasp two individuals firmly by the back of their necks and say, ‘Hi guys, how’s it ... going?’”

“The pause served to emphasize that he already knew how it was going and he was just there to make sure it went another direction. You have to respect someone with that much clairvoyance, but I really think it was that he cared enough about us to keep us out of trouble.”

Fr. Bernard’s intuitive people skills came in handy in selecting students, some of whom did not fit the “brainy” Cistercian stereotype.

During the spring of his first year as headmaster, a troubled youth from MacArthur High School asked if he might apply. Having recently moved to Texas, Robert Newkirk ’84 felt lost at his new public school. He was beginning to mix with a dangerous crowd. He sensed that he needed a more stable, supportive environment.

“Robert was slick and people savvy,” Fr. Bernard remembered. “Some people wondered if he was genuine or just trying to pull the wool over our

eyes. But there was something interesting about him so I gave him a chance to prove himself.”

Perhaps Fr. Bernard saw a little of himself in Newkirk. The 15-year-old Marton Antal had experienced his share of difficulties at Irving High School after arriving from Hungary. Now Fr. Bernard hoped he could help out the kid from out of town.

After evaluating Newkirk’s PSAT scores, Fr. Bernard said, “You can come but you must repeat your junior year and work very hard.” Newkirk agreed. To this day, Newkirk insists that Cistercian changed his life.



Gyuri (“Georgie”) Marton at 17 years old with his foster family, the Petersons of Irving in 1958. After attending Irving High School for one year, Marton enrolled at Jesuit in Dallas where he graduated in 1960.

“We have a need,” Fr. Bernard stated mysteriously to Bob Haaser in the spring of 1983. The forever-young coach and history teacher might have guessed where this conversation was heading. Fr. Bernard was facing a shortage of priests to serve as form master at a time when he was planning ways to expand the student body.

Fr. Peter Verhalen ’73 and Fr. Gregory Schweers began teaching full-time in 1981 and immediately joined the form master rotation (Fr. Peter with the Class of ’89 and Fr. Greg with the Class of ’90). Yet the problems persisted because a number of priests fell out of the form master rotation.



Fr. Bernard saw extraordinary potential in Tom Hillary (left) and Bob Haaser (right). Haaser would give up his position as varsity football coach to serve as form master of the Class of '92. Hillary would coach the Hawks for 16 years.

Fr. Mark Major, form master of the Class of 1982, decided to return to Europe prior to his class' senior year. (Fr. Bernard was forced to bring Fr. Denis back into service to oversee that class for their last year, his second senior class in as many years.) Then, during the course of the 1981-82 school year, Fr. Aurel Mensáros notified the abbot that he would leave the monastery after his duties as form master of the Class of '83 concluded the following year. When Fr. Denis underwent a quadruple by-pass operation during the summer of 1982, it was clear he needed a break (he would go to Rome to study Sacred Scripture to complete the work he had started in 1974). Health problems also sidelined Fr. Aloysius Kimecz

"I have spoken with the fathers," Fr. Bernard continued gingerly, carefully watching Mr. Haaser. "I thought you would like to know we think you are ready to become a form master. Do you think you might like to try it?"

The offer, essentially an eight-year employment

contract, surprised Haaser, but he understood the offer was a sign of deep respect. Haaser talked it over with his wife. He loved athletics and coaching. But this was a special opportunity. Haaser concluded that his career as an educator would not be complete without a chance to lead a class.

"Yes, Father, I am ready to try new things," he told Fr. Bernard the following day. He was put in charge of the Class of '92. The job began in the fall of 1983.

"You know, I've raised a family and it is a wonderful undertaking and very difficult," Haaser reflected recently. "Being a form master is the closest thing to it."

He would have 28 sons at Cistercian at the same time: his son, Bobby Haaser '91, and the 27 boys in the Class of '92.

With Haaser's promotion to form master, Fr. Bernard had solved one problem, but created another. Haaser had been Coach of the Year in the TISC in 1981. Who was going to replace him and serve as athletic director? "Somehow I just believed

it would all work out,” Fr. Bernard recalled.

He wanted Tom Hillary, a three-sport letterman at SMU who had impressed Fr. Bernard as a basketball coach during the 1979-80 season. He had commanded the respect of the boys. Fr. Bernard liked that.

But repeated attempts to bring Hillary back to Cistercian had failed over the past two years. He was not ready for the kind of commitment the Cistercian monks expected.

But, just when Fr. Bernard needed him most, Hillary called out of the blue and told Fr. Bernard he was ready to return on Cistercian’s terms, this time as the varsity football coach and athletic director.

Somehow, Fr. Bernard had fashioned a recruiting coup out of a staffing problem. In Haaser, Cistercian had gained a great new form master whose intelligence, commitment, and personality would take him into increasingly important jobs. And in Hillary, Fr. Bernard had found one of the finest high school football coaches in North Texas, one who would create a sterling reputation for Cistercian athletics.

“What do you need?” Jere Thompson ’74 asked Fr. Bernard as they walked together toward the school from the abbey after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve 1982. A little snow was falling. Thompson’s question arose out of conversations he had had with Stanford chum Jim Moroney ’74. It was time, they had decided, to give something back to Cistercian.

Fr. Bernard had been waiting for such a moment. Work already had begun on expanding class sizes but he knew classroom space would run out quickly. He and Fr. Denis, who was spending this school year studying Scripture in Rome, had conceptualized plans for a new building. Al Salem,

the architect of the gym, had even sketched out a few preliminary ideas for the new building.

“We need a science center,” Fr. Bernard shot back without hesitation. “Then the science labs in the school can be converted to classrooms and we can continue with our expansion.”

“How much do you need?” asked Thompson.

“One million,” Fr. Bernard said.

Thompson stopped and turned to face the headmaster. “Father, you’ve got it.”

Abbot Anselm and the board quickly formalized the campaign, and Thompson and Moroney took on the responsibilities of co-chairs. But they had their skeptics.

“Those kids don’t have any idea what it’s going to take to raise \$1 million,” Bryan Smith reportedly said at the time. The abbot, a close friend of Smith’s, made it clear to everyone that no construction would take place until every last dime was collected. There would be no debt, no wishing and hoping.

“That just fired us up,” Thompson remembered.

The young fund-raisers found that foundations were receptive to their pitch. First of all, no one from Cistercian had approached them in years. Secondly, the school’s academic record was now well documented.

Compared with the fund-raising efforts for the gym in 1971, Thompson and Moroney were aided by favorable economic conditions, a much larger parent pool, and a couple hundred alumni who could provide some help. (Moroney had established the Cistercian Alumni Association several years earlier and had begun publishing a periodical he named *The Continuum* to communicate with them.)

Another factor worked in the favor of the young fund-raisers. Reports of Japan’s supremacy over America in science and technology filled the media and primed givers for Cistercian’s pitch for a science center.



Chris Bock, a beloved English teacher during the eighties, launched Reflections in 1982.

“The people at the foundations were fascinated with these two twenty-something alumni out there trying to raise funds,” Moroney said. “It was like we were girl scouts selling cookies. They had a hard time turning us down.”

Meanwhile, the cost of the project grew from the original estimate of \$1 million to over \$2 million. A computer lab, a large lecture hall, and more windows were now included. Bricked archways (that reminded Thompson and Moroney of Stanford) were added to tie the building into the rest of the school. Finally, an endowment fund for the building was created so that future parents would not be burdened with the upkeep of the building.

It took nearly two years to complete the campaign. As promised, Abbot Anselm postponed construction until all the funds had been collected. Construction began in October 1984 and 24-year-old project manager Warren Andres '77 used a computer to help keep the project on schedule, turning it over in time for the first class in the fall of 1985 despite an unusually rainy year.

“The initiative and effort by Jere and Jim was just a godsend in answer to our need,” Abbot Denis remembered. “They set the example of what Cistercian alumni can be.”

“I had heard on a number of occasions,” said Fr. Bernard, “stories about parents threatening their children, ‘If you don’t behave, I’ll send you to Cistercian.’ That perception — that Cistercian was some kind of reform school — showed that our image was not properly transmitted to our clientele.”

During the early eighties, Fr. Bernard worked on several fronts to improve the school’s visibility and

enhance its reputation. His Hungarian charm and American salesmanship combined to work wonders in academic, collegiate, and community circles.

Fortunately, Cistercian’s academic reputation was receiving a boost at the same time.

Before he left office, Fr. Denis decided it would be beneficial for Cistercian to become a member of the Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS). He hoped this affiliation would provide a support system for Fr. Bernard.

When the accreditation process was completed during the 1981-2 school year, Cistercian became only the second Catholic school run by a religious order to join the ISAS (The Academy of the Sacred Heart in New Orleans being the first).

“I always tell people if you want to know what kind of organization ISAS is,” ISAS founder Dick Ekdahl said, “just look at the schools that belong to it.” The list included the top private schools in the area: Hockaday, St. Mark’s, Trinity Valley, and Fort Worth Country Day.

While Cistercian had been accredited by the State of Texas since 1966, the ISAS provided the school with an important seal of approval, one that established it as on par with the finest private schools in the region.

In his role as college counselor, Fr. Bernard proved to be a tireless promoter of the school. He enjoyed schmoozing with admissions officers and spreading the word about Cistercian.

When people would ask him where Cistercian students attended college, he might answer, “Wherever they choose.”

Visibility in the community had been enhanced back in the mid-seventies when Jim Moroney Jr. (father of Jim Moroney III '74 and Michael Moroney



Tom Pruitt's influence has been both stabilizing and uplifting. For 34 years and counting, Pruitt's loving persona has rounded off some of Cistercian's hard edges. He also has shaped the English curriculum and promoted the arts as well as community service.

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Baptist school cancels games with Catholics

By Helen Parmley
Religion Editor of The News

After years of competition, Longview Christian Academy officials said Thursday that they have canceled their basketball schedule with Cistercian Preparatory School in Irving because they have learned Cistercian is a Catholic school.

"We thought they were merely a private school," said Stan Kiefer, basketball coach at the academy, an independent Baptist school.

"We didn't know they were

Catholic," he said. "We played them when we had a broader philosophy. Now we are just going to play Baptist schools."

Father Bernard Marton, headmaster of Cistercian, said he was stunned by the cancellation.

"They contacted our coach and said they had not researched our school properly and learned we are Catholic," Marton said. "Ten days before the game, they said they were canceling our schedule because we had philosophical differences.

"When I heard it, I thought,

what kind of a world are we living in?"

It was not the first communication between the schools this year.

Earlier, academy officials notified Cistercian coach Robert Haaser about new rules for cheerleaders performing at their school, Marton said.

"They said cheerleaders must wear skirts no shorter than 2 inches above ground from a kneeling upright position," said Marton. "They said they may not wear long pants and could not

perform mounts, cartwheels, splits or perform cheers with a rock beat.

"They said they were enforcing these rules to assure that cheerleaders would perform like ladies at all times."

When Marton heard the rules, he said he told Haaser not to take the cheerleaders when they played the academy.

"I wasn't going to get a tape measure and begin measuring skirts," Marton said.

Cistercian teams do not belong to a conference.

The school schedules games with other non-conference schools of similar size to be competitive.

This year, Cistercian is playing schools including Selwyn in Denton, Trinity Christian in Addison, Oak Ridge in Fort Worth, Trinity in Midland and EDS (Episcopal), Bethel Baptist, Beverly Hills Baptist, Greenhill School, Heritage Christian and Evangel Temple, all in Dallas.

"We are looking for others," Marton said. "Suddenly we have two open dates on our schedule."

This headline on the bottom of the front page of The Dallas Morning News created weeks of news stories around the country. Headmaster Fr. Bernard Marton was interviewed by networks but maintained his sense of decorum throughout, boosting the name recognition of Cistercian far and wide.

'77) helped persuade officials at the highway department to replace the "Exit" sign off Hwy. 114 with "Cistercian Rd." At the time, this sign put Cistercian "on the map" and was widely celebrated (*The Informer* pictured the sign on its cover in the fall of 1974 with the headline, "Terra Firma").

In March 1983, *D Magazine* published a lengthy piece on the school and abbey, which Fr. Bernard insisted on reading before publication. This major piece (which received billing on the magazine's cover) accurately and favorably presented the school as well as the monks behind the operation.

Fr. Bernard also began advertising wherever his competitors advertised.

"I was concerned not with how it would help us," he said, "but how much not advertising would hurt us. I wanted to ensure that we were sending the proper message. If our competitors advertised, then we needed to advertise."

But all that advertising didn't come even close to generating the kind of name recognition that lay just around the corner.

"Guys, listen up," Coach Mark Parachini barked to his sleepy basketball players who had gathered in the gym on a chilly December morning after final exams. The boys had come to school to practice for two consecutive games against Longview Christian, one at home on December 20, 1983, and one away on January 3, 1984.

"Our next two games are cancelled," he said. "Okay now, let's get out on the court and begin practice."

"Oh well," remembered Chris Marcellus '84, the only senior on that year's varsity team. "Let's just move on." That, he expected, was the end of the affair.

Not quite. On Friday, January 30, 1983, The Dallas Morning News ran a front-page story with the headline, "Baptist school cancels games with Catholics." Cistercian was suddenly big news.

"We didn't know they were Catholic," explained Stan Kiefer, Longview Christian's basketball coach to Helen Parmley, the religion editor of The News. "We played them when we had a broader philosophy. Now we are just going to play Baptist schools."

Fr. Bernard was quoted as saying, "When I heard it, I thought, what kind of world are we living in?"

The article also revealed that Cistercian had



“I had full and complete trust in Rodney,” said Fr. Bernard. “I gave him his first administrative job and it evolved to the point where I named him administrative assistant several years later. He became my right-hand man.”

been notified about Longview Christian regulations pertaining to cheerleaders (e.g., skirts no shorter than two inches above the ground from a kneeling upright position, no cartwheels). Fr. Bernard had simply instructed the cheerleaders not to make the trip.

“I wasn’t going to get a tape measure and begin measuring skirts,” Fr. Bernard told the reporter from the News.

When Fr. Bernard had shared his thoughts with Parmley the day before, he had no idea this was front-page material. (Parmley told Fr. Bernard later that she also was surprised to see the story appear on page one.) At 9 am Fr. Bernard fielded a call from CBS News Radio. Fr. Bernard insisted to the reporter that this was an isolated event and emphasized that the school maintained very good relationships with its non-Catholic neighbors. When Fr. Bernard asked when the story would air, the reporter said it would be the lead item at the 10 am news hour.

The phone calls didn’t stop. NBC, ABC, the Dallas Times Herald, Bishop Tschoepe, and

many more called. By the next day, newspapers around the country had picked up the story.

“I have always admired Fr. Bernard for his response during that time,” said Jon Evans ’86. “He could have been in the national media. Attention on a greater scale than ever imagined could have been drawn to the school and to Fr. Bernard himself. However, he did not succumb to the lure of the media, which is a hard thing to do. I do believe that Fr. Bernard wanted a national reputation for Cistercian, but not in that manner and not by those means.”

Despite Fr. Bernard’s best efforts to defuse the story, it bounced around the papers in various columns and letters to the editor for over two weeks.

“These have been very trying days for me, a crash course in PR,” Fr. Bernard wrote shortly after the hubbub had subsided.

Only later would it become clear that the incident had sent Cistercian’s name recognition through the roof. Overly zealous school officials in Longview had unwittingly blessed Cistercian with the kind

of nationwide publicity that money can't buy.

Fr. Bernard had handled it like a pro.

"How long do you think you'll stay?" Fr. Bernard asked Greg Novinski '82 during his interview for a teaching position in 1988. "Perhaps I could stay five or ten," Novinski started to say. But before he had finished his sentence, Fr. Bernard smilingly interjected, "Or fifteen or twenty or twenty-five."

"That shocked me," Novinski remembered.

Fr. Bernard assigned Novinski to teach Algebra II to Form VI, which happened to include one David Novinski '90. It would be the first time in anyone's recollection that brother had taught brother at Cistercian. (Ronnie Shepherd had taught English to his future brothers-in-law Tom Martin '70, Joe Pat Martin '73, and David Martin '74 in the late sixties and early seventies).

"This particular sophomore class was very talented mathematically," Novinski recalled, "and enjoyed testing the first-year teacher (a CPS tradition) both intellectually and in discipline. It was a humbling experience."

"Of the many things that I learned that year," Novinski commented, "the one that struck me the most was that I was 'on my own' in terms of improvement of my knowledge, teaching methods, and discipline of my class."

"At the same time, I had a strong undercurrent of support from the administration via a combination of confidence in me and high expectation of my performance."

Sounds much like the way in which Cistercian teachers handle students.

Currently, alumni are involved in a number of

key teaching and administrative positions. Besides Abbot Peter and Novinski, Tim Parker '90 teaches science, and serves as facilities director. Then there are the young monks who also are alumni: Fr. Augustine Hoelke '00, Fr. Philip Lastimososa '00, Br. Stephen Gregg '01, and Br. Lawrence '01. Michael O'Brien '00 teaches English and sponsors the literary magazine. David Patrick '85 directed the Upper School drama, teaches electives, and sponsors the yearbook. Meanwhile, many others have passed through the school, helping out or testing the waters for a career choice.

"One of the reasons for which I returned to teach (and live the life of a Cistercian)," said Fr. Peter, "was that I so admired the Cistercians who had taught me. I admired what I perceived to be their commitment to truth and culture and science in harmony with their commitment to their faith."

"Teaching at Cistercian means carrying on a tradition," he added, "maintaining some continuity of history, sharing with today's students some stories from times past, and maintaining the commitment to studies and faith that I so admired in my teachers."

Adam Nevitt suggested that alumni teachers "provide the students the opportunity to ask questions or develop a more

personal relationship with faculty knowing that they experienced the same Cistercian life." He should know. Greg Novinski was his form master.

"Somehow," Fr. Peter said, "the allegiance of an alumnus who comes back to teach is unimpeachable." And students, consciously or subconsciously, cannot fail to recognize the significance.



"How long do you think you'll stay?" Fr. Bernard asked Greg Novinski '82 during his interview in 1988. Following in the footsteps of Rodney Walter and Bob Haaser, Novinski appears well on his way to becoming a "lifer."

“This is where I want to go to school,” seven-year-old Matthew McAuliff ’00 told his dad on a visit to Cistercian in 1988. The words warmed the heart of Steve McAuliff ’71. Two years later, Matthew McAuliff was admitted to Cistercian’s Class of ’00, the first legacy in the history of the school.

“It was a total kick to see my son have to go through Latin class with Fr. Matthew,” McAuliff Sr. laughed. “There’s hardly anything that can compare with that as a common experience between father and son.”

Since Matthew McAuliff ’00 entered Cistercian in the fall of 1991, the number of legacies has grown nearly every year. As of 2012, 25 legacies have graduated from Cistercian.

Parents of legacies often remark on how many things about a Cistercian education have remained the same. Each alumnus parent agrees, however, that behavior and discipline have changed dramatically for the better.

“Our class was an exercise in non-discipline,” noted Chris Crawley ’83 of the early eighties. “Many of us were on some kind of probation for much of the V-VIII Forms. An occasional pop on the back of the head was common place, and usually deserved. They tried to keep us in-line.”

But slowly, the tide began to turn.

“Somewhere in the late eighties, there was a palpable change,” asserted Greg Novinski. “It was no longer us versus them.”

“Students nowadays realize that the school is working in their interest,” Fr. Roch Kereszty said. “It doesn’t have to be some kind of struggle between students and teachers.

“For me, it used be very difficult to maintain discipline,” he recalled. “It was like being on the front lines. I was afraid of every new trick

the boys would present. But, gradually, I gained self-confidence and it just disappeared.

“Now I say to them, ‘Don’t try this. You know I am half deaf. Don’t take advantage of me.’”

“The boys now seem to understand that the teachers are on their side,” explained Novinski. “We’re all headed in the same direction. Teachers are not perceived to be bending the students to their will.”

“We used to look back through old yearbooks,” said Jeremy Gregg ’97. “We saw the beer cans, senior lounges, and cigarettes, and resented the loss of what seemed to us the great golden age of the school. Our lunch breaks were unfortunately not filled with the stories that we would be ashamed to tell our children; we mostly just spent our time on the field, ensuring that we would be disgustingly sweaty before the afternoon classes.”

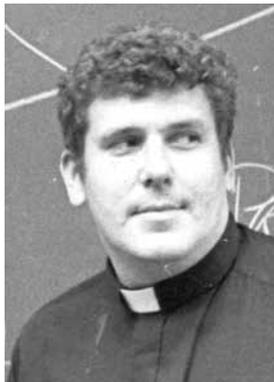
Not only are students less likely to cause serious troubles these days, they also are more likely to demonstrate their respect and appreciation for their teachers and form masters.

“Before I begin,” bellowed Jim Moroney to the Class of 2001 several years ago when invited to discuss business ethics with Fr. Roch’s class, “I want you to know that you are so lucky to have someone like Fr. Roch as your form master.”

Before Moroney had finished his sentence, the entire form rose in unison and delivered a rousing, standing ovation. Moroney was astounded.

“I had hoped to tell them something that it took most of us many years to learn,” Moroney recollected. “Turns out, they were way ahead of me. They clearly did appreciate Fr. Roch.

“It was remarkably different from the way we would have reacted,” Moroney commented. “We were more conflicted, more angst-filled. We had a



Much of the school’s stability comes from faculty members like (clockwise from top left): Betty Sitton, chemistry, Fr. Roch, theology, Fr. Gregory Schweers, English, and Roberto Munguia, art. All have taught at Cistercian for 30 or more years.

more complex relationship with our form master. But, this was a mutual admiration society.”

Fr. Roch believes the respect and improved behavior can be attributed partly to Cistercian’s excellent reputation and its ability to select the best students and families.

“This selection process also makes the students feel privileged to come here,” he said. “Students today have a genuine respect for the school and its teachers.”

“Throughout society today, the relationship between students and authority figures is not so antagonistic as it was in the seventies,” he suggested. “The Vietnam War seems to have ignited a crisis of confidence in parents, politics, and the church. Today, kids have a lot more confidence in society’s structures.”

“That standing ovation was perfectly natural for us,” said Chris Gruber ’01, who believes any one of his classmates would say the very same thing. “We were very into giving Fr. Roch standing ovations and we still are.”

While that appreciation may be widespread among recent graduating classes, the Class of ’01 had reasons to be particularly grateful.

“Not only did he wait on us hand-and-foot,” Brad Weiland ’01 shared, “he helped us through some very difficult times, like the passing of Brian Price during our freshman year and the passing of Coach Hillary two years later.”

“Those were times,” Gruber reflected, “that we saw with great clarity how deeply he loves us.”

“I just kept the train on the tracks,” demured Fr. Bernard, reflecting on his 15-year tenure as headmaster. “I was just a caretaker.” This sentiment reflects the long-term, selfless perspective of a man who, in 1993, advised Abbot Denis that he was ready to step down as headmaster. He was primed for other things, like running marathons.

The abbot finally allowed Fr. Bernard to step down and pursue other activities in June 1996. Fr. Bernard was the first Cistercian headmaster with an American high school education. He was the last with a Hungarian accent. For 15 years, he personified Cistercian’s unique blend of Old and New World values.

Fr. Bernard left Cistercian wholly transformed. Using all of his ample promotional and inter-personal skills, he implemented a complex expansion plan

that doubled the size of the student body, with no reduction in academic standards. In fact, Cistercian emerged from his stewardship as widely recognized for both its academic and athletic excellence.

The expansion also brought financial stability. Abbot Anselm would have been relieved. During his 33 years in Texas, financial issues had consumed him. Now, eight years after his death in August 1988, he would no longer have to worry.

It had taken nearly 35 years and four headmasters, but the school finally had achieved the kind of success that stabilized the abbey’s finances and direction. The abbey’s financial stability, in turn, provided hope that Cistercian would remain for future generations what it had been for the first 33 graduating classes.

“When you look at all the changes in the heads of private schools in the area,” Bryan Smith insisted, “you begin to appreciate how special Cistercian is. Cistercian has never had to think about going outside. There always were people in the wings who were viable candidates to take over key jobs. That is a remarkable element of stability.”

In each headmaster (and in each abbot), Cistercian was blessed with men of great talent who remained committed to the boys, to the institutions of both the school and the abbey. Their efforts always served a higher purpose than themselves. It seems the difficulties of the seventies taught them an important lesson — the strength of Cistercian lies not in any one individual, but in the community.

“The prep school is a family enterprise,” explained Fr. Bernard. “We all help each other out. That’s the strength that the monastery brings to the school. We all have been successful at one aspect or another of the job. The great thing is that each headmaster is supported by his brothers who can fill in where needed.”

As Fr. Peter assumed the role of headmaster in 1996, he grew quickly in the job by benefiting from the 26 years of experience that he could call on at any time.

“Three headmasters are not supposed to be able to live together and work together,” emphasized Abbot Denis. “It is considered impossible for the former boss to stick around without causing friction. But we’ve learned how to do it. We have given an example.”

Chapter 5

One of our own — 1996 - 2012

The phone rang at school just a few minutes before the 8:30 am bell. Souad Shrime, mother of Mark '92 and Ryan '96, was calling from the hospital room on a Friday in the middle of May 1996. Her husband had been fighting cancer since January. The battle was taking a turn for the worse.

Cistercian priests had visited Dr. George Shrime's hospital room on a regular basis ever since hearing about his condition. "Nothing was spoken. We didn't ask them to come to the hospital," Mrs. Shrime said. "They just came."

Ryan's form master, Fr. Henry, spent many hours lending his moral support to the family along with Fr. Gregory, who had grown close to Ryan his senior year. "Ryan and Fr. Greg were like two peas in a pod," said Mrs. Shrime.

Fr. Peter also devoted hours to the Shrime family, in

the hospital room and at their home in Lake Highlands where he conducted a Bible Study class. At those weekly sessions, Mrs. Shrime often would ask Fr. Peter if there was anything she could do for him. "Just pray for us," he said, "and pray for me." Several months later she learned Fr. Peter had been appointed Cistercian Prep's new headmaster. Fr. Bernard would finally receive the rest he had sought for so long.

"Fr. Peter prayed fervently that my husband would make it to Ryan's graduation," Mrs. Shrime recalled.

But when the phone rang in the school at 8:30 that morning, Mrs. Shrime was calling because she felt those prayers would go unanswered. She needed the Cistercians there with her. Juggling class schedules, priests rotated in and out. The monks would maintain a near-constant presence at the hospital for the next several days. Fr. Denis, Fr. Bernard, Fr. Henry, Fr. Gregory, and

Fr. Peter all shared time beside Mrs. Shrime and her kids, Mark, Maria, and Ryan, who were there non-stop.

“It was a very private time in our lives,” recalled Ryan Shrime. “No one was at the hospital with us Sunday morning, except for the priests. My sister had met the priests only at school functions, but she was comfortable with them; we were all strengthened by their presence. There was a real feeling of peace when they were in the room. They didn’t have to say anything.

“I didn’t cry very often in the last couple of days of my father’s life. We had been awake for so long, our senses were numbed,” he said. “But I remember leaving the hospital room for a few minutes of down time. When I returned and saw Fr. Peter there, I just lost it.

“Their presence was so important; they were like angels in the room. I was so grateful. I felt protected with them there,” Ryan added.

Mid-morning on Sunday, while his classmates attended their Baccalaureate Mass and Breakfast, Ryan saw his father losing the battle. As Dr. Shrime’s life drew to an end, Mrs. Shrime turned to Fr. Peter for guidance. “What do you say?” she asked.

“There is nothing more to do,” said Fr. Peter, who stood on one side of the hospital room door.

Then Mrs. Shrime looked to Fr. Gregory who stood on the other side of the door. He bowed his head, overcome with tears. “At that point, we all broke down,” said Ryan.

“The six of us were bonded forever in that moment,” Mrs. Shrime said.

“You applied for this job?” Fr. Peter often asked other school administrators when he first met them. Cistercian headmasters stand out among the other private school heads; they’re a rather odd breed. They do not set out consciously to climb the career ladder of

school administration. Positions at larger institutions do not interest them. They are Cistercians first, educators second, and headmasters third. Running the school is service work — a case of servant leadership.

“I didn’t campaign for the job,” said Fr. Bernard, “and neither did Fr. Peter.”

“I don’t believe Fr. Denis, Fr. Bernard, or I would have been a headmaster at any other school,” Fr. Peter added. “No one in the abbey has the ambition to be headmaster.”

Fr. Bernard, who served for 15 years without a

break, tried to be excused from the job for several years. He had grown tired of the stress. (He was asked frequently, “Did you resign out of protest? Was there a power struggle?”) Upon his retirement from the position, Fr. Bernard said it was a job he had taken simply in obedience to his vocation.

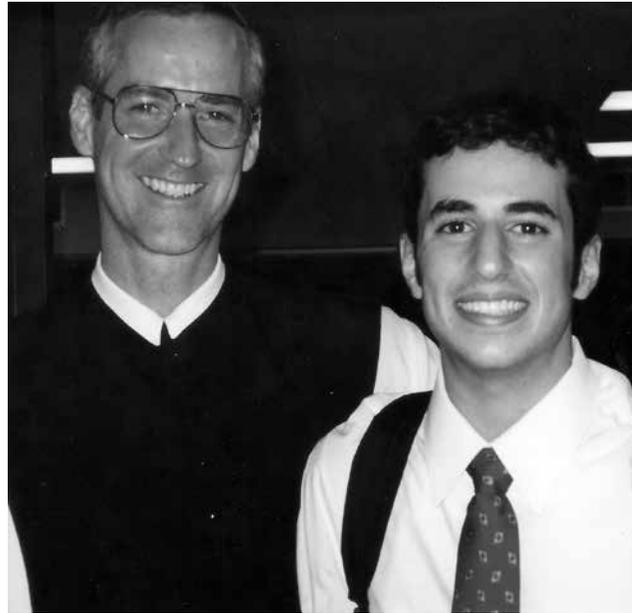
Along the way, he had help.

“The school couldn’t have doubled in size during those years without Fr. Peter,” Fr. Bernard said. “He made it possible through his diligent work on the curriculum and his organizational skills. In some ways, I was just the front man.

“It’s a tough job,” he added. “You are tugged at from all sides. You have to try to be your own man, and you can’t try to satisfy all the demands. You do have to accommodate. It can be very stressful.”

Most acknowledge that Cistercian’s first headmaster, Fr. Damian, was a master at public relations. Fr. Denis made good on those promises by formalizing the school’s curriculum, systematizing functions, and raising the school’s academic standards. Fr. Bernard enjoyed orchestrating and promoting the school’s growth in enrollment.

Fr. Peter officially took over as headmaster a few weeks after Dr. Shrime’s funeral at Cistercian and Ryan Shrime’s emotional valedictory address at the 1996 commencement exercises. The death of Dr. Shrime



Two Cistercian valedictorians, Fr. Peter Verhalen '73 at the commencement of Ryan Shrime '96, just a week after his father's passing. Fr. Peter would take over as headmaster the following month.



Headmasters in residence Fr. Bernard Marton (left) and Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy (right) advised and supported Fr. Peter as needed over the years. “Three headmasters are not supposed to be able to live and work together,” Abbot Denis laughed.

and the outpouring of support for his family drew the community together in a very special way. Fr. Peter sought to keep that feeling of selflessness going.

“I was ready, excited, anxious,” said Fr. Peter about becoming headmaster, “and naive.”

“We all know that the people who wear the black and white habits have a vocation,” Fr. Peter stated to the faculty at their retreat at the start of the 2001-02 school year. “For years, lay faculty members have worked here alongside the monks.”

“Now, I want everybody to look at it a little differently,” he emphasized. “Look upon yourselves as having a vocation in this school and to this school.”

“Everybody looked at each other,” remembered Bob Haaser. “This had never been said before. He was acknowledging us, and calling us to give more.”

“During the rest of the day,” Haaser recalled, “that idea kept running through my mind. It got me to think more about what I was doing in this place.”

For the first few years of his tenure as headmaster, Fr. Peter had devoted much of his energies to mastering the components of the school he had not yet encountered (e.g., retirement plans, facilities management, audits). He applied the kind of diligence to each that he earned him the title as valedictorian of the Class of 1973. He was prepared to run each and every department of the school, just like his two predecessors. The headmaster had been guided by the principle that a Cistercian could do it more effectively and more cheaply than lay faculty.

But circumstances and times had changed. Administrators from other private schools were making their preliminary visits to Cistercian in anticipation of the 2002 accreditation. They cautioned

Fr. Peter that the school's future was endangered by concentrating too much responsibility in the hands of one executive. What would happen if that executive was somehow incapacitated?

Cistercian's first American headmaster began preparing not just to help the school make a good grade on its accreditation, but to be the best in class.

"I wanted Cistercian to live up to the standards of the best private schools," Abbot Peter reflected. "I wanted that same kind of professionalism throughout Cistercian, and not just in the faculty and curriculum."

"Despite the unique aspects of our governance at Cistercian," said Abbot Peter referring to the abbey's and the monks' ultimate responsibility for the school, "I felt we could play their game and still win."

"Why don't you just hire me?" Janet Bucher-Long half jokingly asked Fr. Peter in the spring of 2006 at the end of a phone conversation. "That way you wouldn't have to call and ask my advice so often." Bucher-Long was serving in her 27th year at The Hockaday School and Fr. Peter knew of her reputation as one of the most sought-after college advisors in the area. He also knew her through her son Russell Bucher '99.

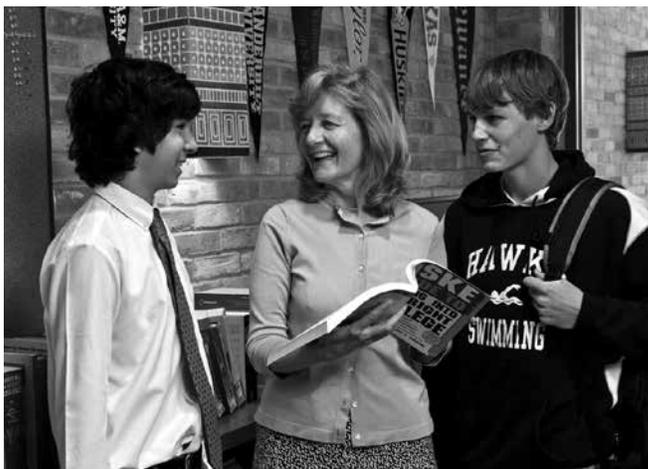
"Oh no," said Fr. Peter. "We wouldn't hire an outsider as college counselor, and certainly not a woman."

But not long after that phone call, Fr. Peter called back. He asked her to come and talk about the job of college counselor at Cistercian.

"I need a sitting room outside my office with a

window in between," she said. "I want the boys to be comfortable while they review college books and do searches on the computer. And I want them to see me in my office so they know what it is about."

If anyone wondered just how far Fr. Peter was willing to go to bring Cistercian up to the standards of the other schools, hiring Bucher-Long (and providing her with the required office and lounge) answered all doubts.



The appointments of Janet Bucher-Long (above) and Christine Medaille (below) to key administrative posts spoke volumes about Fr. Peter's vision for the school.

In the summer of 2006, she became only the third college counselor in Cistercian history, and the first to take on the job full-time. Fr. Denis and Fr. Bernard had worked wonders as college counselor for the school while carrying their duties as headmaster, form master, and teacher. In addition to support for the application process, Bucher-Long would help upperclassmen understand the process of making the transition from high school student to college student.

At the same time, 20-year veteran Christine Medaille was elevated to the positions of director of curriculum and director of testing. She would have responsibility for two of the most elemental aspects of Cistercian. Prior to this appointment, only the most capable monks had been given responsibility for this

job. She would control "the big board" and scheduling classes.

Fr. Peter had made changes before, naming Bob Haaser as director of admissions in 1996 (after a two-year apprenticeship) and Greg Novinski as dean of students in 1998; but never before had he taken such dramatic steps in an effort to delegate the responsibilities of the headmaster.

Either move would have caused a stir. Taken together — two women taking on two critical roles previously held only by the most capable priests — the changes illustrated the increasing authority the abbot was vesting in the American headmaster.

“You know, Janet,” Fr. Peter confided to Bucher-Long after hiring her, “the boys need a soft spot.”

Fr. Peter’s imprint and his determination to elevate every department was being felt by everyone.

“At School Board meetings around 2000 and 2001,” recalled Jim Moroney ’74, “we began to discuss whether Cistercian could remain Cistercian without the Cistercians. With the lack of vocations, it became a very real issue.”

“We wondered whether the abbot would allow the school to be run by a layman,” added Peter Smith.

“Fr. Peter was having eye problems (Fuchs Dystrophy),” Smith said. “He was having trouble reading. What would happen if Fr. Peter had to step down?”

At the time of Fr. Peter’s pivotal remarks to the faculty in 2001, the crisis of priestly vocations had reached a crescendo.

Over the 40+ years of the monastery’s existence, just seven Americans had fulfilled vocations to the monastery. Meanwhile, the final generation of Hungarians was fast approaching retirement age.

Abbot Denis redoubled the efforts and time devoted engaging the young men who showed an interest in a vocation. A newly formed vocations committee was prepared to lead them through the process of making their decision. Retreats were

initiated. Visits to the abbey’s retreat house were encouraged. The community began to sell itself. And, providentially, the vocations began to come.

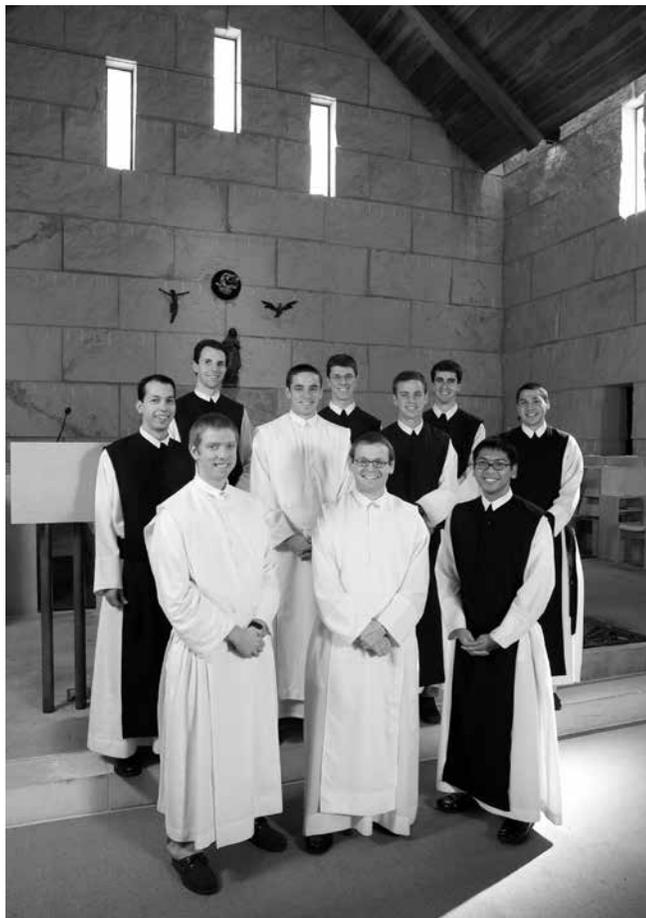
“The novices are very impressed with the way we are anchored and emotionally at home with our boys,” Abbot Denis commented in 2003. “We know so much about them. There is this ongoing memory of hundreds of boys. [The novices] can see how rich this life is in personal relationships. It is a fruitful, dedicated life we lead.”

“All of a sudden,” Fr. Roch remembered in 2003, “these guys are falling out of the sky. We have a role to play, but they are really an undeserved gift.” By 2005, the abbey had attracted 10 young monks, including four Cistercian alumni.

Meanwhile, softening demand for office space prompted an important piece of property to be put up for sale. The 20 acres adjacent to the campus to the east had concerned the abbot and Fr. Peter for years. Development on this property would be plainly visible from the campus and destroy the quietude everyone associated with the abbey and school held dear. Jere Thompson and Peter Smith began negotiations with the seller. When the seller held out, the abbot intervened.

“You may be worried about the price,” he told Thompson. “I am worried about our security many years from now when no one will remember the price.” The 20 acres were purchased, insulating the campus from the intrusions of development there in the future. With the help of Jim Bloodgood ’74, Amegy Bank had provided a loan to finance the purchase of the property.

Two key pieces to the puzzle of Cistercian’s future had suddenly materialized, practically out of thin air.



The crisis of vocations in 2001 had turned into an urgent need to plan for the future. By August of 2006, the abbey began to fill with young brothers, including four alumni of the school.



Co-chairmen of the 50th Anniversary Campaign were (l-r) Jim Moroney '74, Peter Smith '74, and Jere Thompson '74. Fr. Peter and Joel Fontenot served as the lightning rods.

Neither could have been imagined in 2001.

“There was a complete change in attitude,” said Joel Fontenot, who would be named to the School Board in 2007. “Instead of a fear over whether the school could exist in the future, it was clear that there was a bright future. And there was so much we needed to do.”

“There was this transition,” he added, “to the recognition that we need to rebuild the school since it will be here for another 50 years.”

School Board members also began to discuss the symbolic and practical ramifications of the year 2012, a year in which the school would celebrate its 50th anniversary and Abbot Denis would retire. It was very plausible that Fr. Peter would be elected abbot at that time.

Fr. Paul McCormick began taking on administrative duties in addition to serving as form master of the Class of 2013 (he also served as form master of the Class of 2005) and his teaching duties in the fall of 2009. First he was assigned duties as head of Middle School. A year later in the fall of 2010, Fr. Paul assumed the role of director of admissions.

While taking over for a legend in Bob Haaser, Fr. Paul brought excellent organizational and a natural interest in marketing. He also sought to gain efficiencies by beginning to computerize application files for review.

Under Fr. Peter, the school had embarked on several important campaigns that improved the athletic fields, converted the science building's lecture hall into

a theater, added the east gym, tennis courts, and an art room, and squeezed more classroom space out of the Upper School building. But the 50th Anniversary Campaign was three to five times as large as any of those campaigns and would stretch over a five-year period. With a goal of \$15 million, the campaign would fund the 20-acre land purchase, renovate, enlarge, and reconfigure the Upper School, renovate and reconfigure the Middle School, add to the endowment, plus construct a new entrance building between the two iconic O'Neil Ford structures. The ambitious goals – by far the largest and most extensive campaign ever contemplated – seemed daunting enough. No one anticipated the prolonged recession that began in September 2008.

While Cistercian's three traditional lead fundraisers, Jere Thompson '74, Jim Moroney '74, and Peter Smith '74, would serve as co-chairmen, Fontenot was selected to act as its lightning rod, its rainmaker. In Fontenot, Cistercian had found a dogged salesman with an in-your-face frankness and a tender passion for the school. His pushing, probing, and cajoling evoked images of Bryan F. Smith, one of the school's founders who served as the primary fundraiser in early days. While Fontenot represented a change in fundraising tactics, the size of the campaign demanded a new approach.

As an enthusiastic and effective Sustentation captain for the Class of '12, Fontenot had had the confidence of School Board member and dynamic Sustentation chairman David Haley. Fontenot and his wife Sherry had known Lori and David Haley since

college. With his youngest son approaching graduation in 2009, Haley believed Fontenot would be the right man to push the campaign through to its conclusion.

The ambitious goals of the campaign also demanded the intimate involvement of the man at the top. “Fr. Peter often comes off as laid-back,” commented Joel Fontenot, “but inside is a type-A guy. Everyone knew he had to be the one raising the money.”

“Fr. Peter evolved into a terrific solicitor,” said Peter Smith. His quiet and measured style gave prospective donors a sense of the abbey’s commitment to the school. Fr. Peter could speak to the Cistercians’ monastic mission, the talented young monks, the school’s track record, the plans for the future, and the superb faculty and staff. His words built trust.

“I believed that we needed a place in which the new monks would be able to teach for the next 50 years,” Abbot Peter reflected. “Monks must live by the work of their hands. So we had to make sure that the school was physically in good shape, so that it could remain a thriving place of employment for the monks.”

While Fr. Peter stepped up to the challenge of raising money, he continued to tweak the internal workings and systems of the school.

“Once we launched into the big campaign,” remembered Smith, “that dictated the need to improve the development office, accountability, and donor tracking. It also coincided with the need to provide a real CPA working at the school. At the same time, we upgraded the audit team and formed a committee with two practicing CPAs on the committee along with Fr. Peter and me.”

When spirits drooped and it seemed that all the givers had been exhausted, Fr. Peter began to assume the role of lightning rod.

“We have got to do this,” Fr. Peter told his fundraising team. At the April 2012 Abbot’s Circle dinner, Abbot Peter gave Fontenot the stage to announce the successful completion of the campaign.

“Dee, what do I do now?” Fr. Peter occasionally asks in his prayers. Dee is Dee Walker ’97 who passed away in a car accident about a month after Dr. Shrimel’s battle with cancer ended in May 1996. Fr. Peter was still moving into his new digs in the headmaster’s office.

As Walker’s form master, Fr. Peter remained a pillar not just for the class, but also for his grieving parents. Dee was their only child.

“Fr. Peter had so many roles — teacher, mentor, form master, emotional leader, and headmaster,” remembered Dr. Matthew Nevitt ’97. “As hurt as he



(l-r) Dr. Robert Henderson and Marilyn Henderson present the 2005 Tom Hillary Award to Zach Heard '05 along with Sheila Hillary.

was, he remained emotionally strong for us so that he could lead us. He was stoic. Most of us had not experienced a death so close to us. He called us together before the funeral to talk about Dee so we could express our emotions. He orchestrated us through the grieving process.”

Marilyn Henderson remembered attending the funeral with her son Tucker ’96. “I was struck by the emotion he expressed and felt for losing one of his boys.”

With sons Tucker ’96 and Seth ’03, the Henderson’s also attended Tom Hillary’s funeral, held in the gym in April 2000. Fr. Peter provided special support for Sheila Hillary, and helped comfort the entire community.

Seth Henderson and childhood friend Spencer Bethmann '03 went on to shine, almost in tandem, on the football field and basketball court. As a sophomore, Bethmann was within feet of his pal, when his skull was cracked by hitting the floor after taking a charge. Not long after Henderson went into convulsions, Fr. Bernard came out of the bleachers to administer last rites on the court. Many in the community, especially those associated with the Class of '03 pinched themselves – how could such an injury be sustained? Were sports safe? Then they watched in amazement as Henderson fought back the injury's lingering effects. It would take months of hard work for Henderson to recover his coordination and mental acuity. But by his junior year, he was back and starring once again in baseball, basketball and in football, where he still holds the career record for yards from scrimmage (a combination of passing and rushing yardage).

After graduation, Henderson attended summer school at UT and entertained dreams of walking on at UT to play football. He returned one weekend in July to attend a fraternity party in Dallas.

"I don't know why I called you," stammered Jeff Judge '03 over his cell phone to Bethmann '03, who was hanging out at Preston Center on a warm Friday evening. "We've been in a really bad car wreck. You need to call Dr. and Mrs. Henderson and tell them to go to Baylor."

Clipped from behind by a truck on Central Expressway nearing downtown, both of Judge's backseat occupants were critically injured. (The other occupant would die days later.)

"Fr. Peter arrived at the hospital at the same time we did," remembered Bethmann, who wore a gold "#7" pin on his lapel when Fr. Peter performed his wedding

in South Carolina in September 2011. (Seth wore #7 as quarterback at Cistercian.)

"He talked to each of us, telling us to stay positive," he said. "He counseled Jeff.

"It's part of God's plan," he said.

"It was a huge comfort for me to know that Fr. Peter was there," said Marilyn Henderson. "It's a feeling that is so hard to describe. He is very grounded, compassionate, and loving."

Over the next five weeks, as the tough-minded athlete hung on, Fr. Peter helped support classmates, well-wishers, and the growing number of members from the wider Cistercian community who were moved by the ordeal.

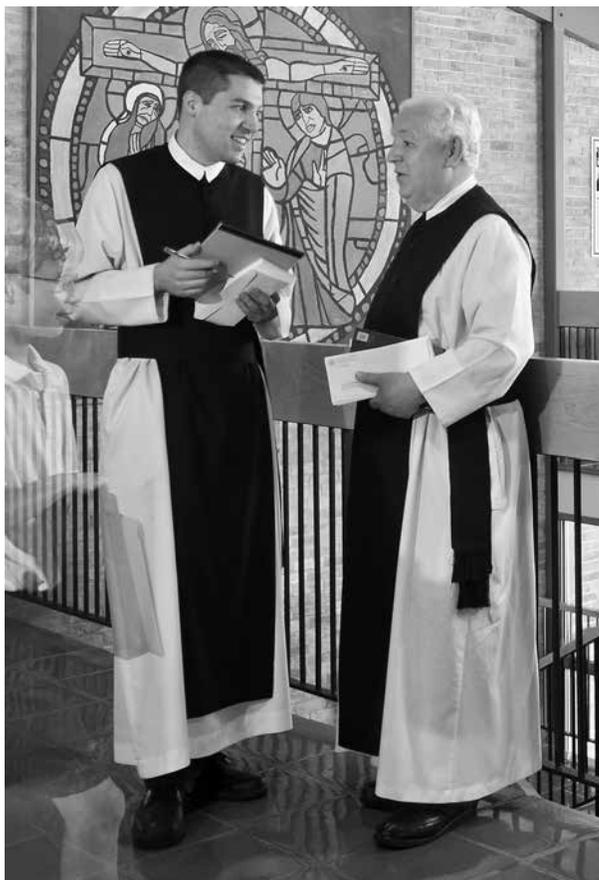
The gym was filled to capacity for Seth's funeral in late August in the gymnasium. The community looked to Fr. Peter for healing. In his homily, he compared the setting to Bethany, the home of Lazarus.

"In Bethany, there was more than the joys of life and the sorrow of death. There was infinitely more, for Jesus Christ himself was there, teaching and giving life ... He says, 'I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me, even if he should die, will live.'"

"You know, in its purest and simplest form," reflected Marilyn Henderson, "Cistercian is an extended family and Fr. Peter is the father figure."

"We will be connected to Cistercian as long as we can walk."

"I remember when Fr. Gregory and I started out as form masters in the early eighties," Abbot Peter chuckled, "we had no idea what we were doing. Form masters were given very little direction and there were



Young form masters like Fr. Augustine Hoelke '00 are supported by outstanding teachers, a powerful Parents' Club, and, in Fr. Augustin's case, his form master, Fr. Julius Lelóczy.

very few traditions. Fr. Bernard was still stabilizing the program and the school was still earning recognition.”

“But I think the young form masters today also have a very difficult job,” he emphasized. “Expectations are higher; the school and society are much less forgiving and quicker to hold them accountable. They are viewed as providers of a service, with parents as their customers.”

While no one would claim that the form master system has perfectly suited every student or family over the decades, Cistercian would not be Cistercian



As the school's first American headmaster, Fr. Peter preserved the best of the school's Hungarian traditions while introducing a distinctively American sensibility and culture. The combination has led to a "golden era" at Cistercian.

without it. The form master system stands out — along with the Cistercians themselves — as the primary characteristic that Cistercian Prep School shares with its Hungarian forbearers.

Around the turn of the millennium, the crisis in vocations threatened the existence of the form master system.

“If the form master system had crumbled,” suggested Jim Moroney, “the school’s culture would have changed dramatically.”

Between 2007 and 2016, just four of the 10 classes graduating would have monks serving as the form master. Fr. Peter would to rely lay form masters far more than any of his predecessors.

Prior to this time, Cistercian had leaned on lay form

masters only rarely. Jerry O’Brien graduated the Class of ’71 as form master. Paul McArdle served as form master for the Class of ’73 for several years between Fr. John Vereb and Fr. Roch. Rodney Walter served as form master for the Class of ’75 through Form IV before being replaced by Fr. Melchior in Form V.

Only Bob Haaser, who served the classes of ’92, ’06, plus ’14, and Greg Novinski ’82, who served the classes of ’99 and ’08, had proved that they were up to the demands of this special job. (Note: Both Walter and Haaser have been awarded diplomas distinguishing them as “honorary alumni” for their outstanding service to Cistercian over the decades.)

Fr. Peter would have to “mine” the storehouse of gems in the lay faculty — men like Peter Saliga, Gary Nied (who took over the Class of ’09 for Fr. Julius in Form V), Dr. Tom Pruit, and Patrick Mehen. Fr. Bernard and Fr. Peter had hired these men who possessed the leadership, character, and intelligence to become “lifers” at Cistercian. Their vocations to the school qualified them to lead forms. They would be supported by outstanding faculty members, a parents’ club (“which is a machine these days,” Fr. Peter commented), and even a form master’s handbook. And, importantly, the families of these men would sacrifice as well,

allowing their husbands and fathers to spend so much time on this new time-consuming role.

Fr. Peter had prepared the school to weather the crisis by striving, as he said in 2002, “to find smart people who also can serve as role models for the boys. I want them to be able to model how you live an intellectual life and a spiritual life. I want teachers who can light up the room. If they have been athletes or musicians, the boys can look up to them and trust them. That’s the kind of person we are always looking for, even though we might not have a specific need.”

The form master system would survive and evolve. The young priests who step in as form masters will also need plenty of support from the likes of Fr. Paul, Christine Medaille, and Greg Novinski, as well as all

the lay faculty members who they can call on for advice and wisdom.

“Perhaps the most amazing feature of his leadership as headmaster — and for me also the most frightening — was the ever-growing demands he placed on himself,” insisted his form master, Fr. Roch. “He always wanted to improve himself, and as a consequence, the school. The results are beautifully obvious and heartening.”

“I wanted to elevate the school’s standing to that of the other premier private schools while recognizing and valuing what is special about our Hungarian traditions,” Abbot Peter reflected.

“As an American, I did want to do more for the boys socially, athletically, and artistically than perhaps Abbot Denis saw fit,” he said. “But I agree with Fr. Denis that we need to stick to a clearly defined mission. We can’t be everything to everybody.”

“Fr. Peter is passionate about improving every aspect of the school,” said Novinski. “He seeks the advice and opinions of the veteran teachers and is open to our improving any part of the program. Fr. Peter really wants to fill out the school in every way possible.”

“Fr. Peter is the type of guy who is a ‘10’ when it comes to self-control,” Ryan Shrime said. “The funny thing is when he kicks back on a hike his self-control goes from a ‘10’ to a ‘9.’ He may be dressed in his civvies on a hike, but he always has the Fr. Peter air, kind of like the oldest brother. He has this definite sense of what is right and what is wrong.”

“People sometimes have the impression that he’s aloof,” said Matthew Nevitt, “but he’s not. I think he is just pensive, constantly analyzing the situation and the possible outcomes before he acts. He’s a very reflective guy.

“When I need some advice on an important life issue, Fr. Peter will be the first person I turn to. He’s been a loyal friend, someone you can always rely on in any kind of situation.”

“I remember our playing tag out on the old Middle School soccer fields beside what’s now the science complex,” said writer Tom Molanphy ’89. “I can still see Fr. Peter dashing over the cleat-marked field, scrambling to snatch 11-year-olds giggling in the tall grass. One

particular day in the winter when the field was slick with mud, Fr. Peter slipped. I can still see him standing back up, his pristine white habit vilified with a deep green stain. Those of us in sight stood frozen, while those in the tall grasses slunk deeper to hide from what we assumed would be a rage.

“But Fr. Peter poked the nearest student, smirked ‘Gotcha!’ and galloped off. For the next eight years, Fr. Peter played tag with us, and he inevitably won. Whether he tapped us with the ethical implications of our actions, touched us with the importance of hard work and play, or grabbed us with his legendary smile and chuckle, Fr. Peter taught us in the best manner: he told us of an honorable way to live, and he supported his brave theory by living that way every day that we were around him.”

“When I go back to the school now, Fr. Peter can’t keep the smile off his face,” Nevitt said. “He’s so excited; sometimes he’s at a loss for words. He may not always know what to say but you can tell he relishes every minute of our time together.”

“Looking back, I couldn’t think of a better time for my dad to pass away,” Shrime reflected on the events of 1996. “Had it happened earlier, I would have been too young and unprepared. Had it happened afterwards, we wouldn’t have had the support of the priests. They gave us so much strength.

“The monks see a lot, a lot more than lay people,” Shrime said. “It always amazes me how many classes they can rear as their own children. I remember going to Fr. Peter’s office and talking to him after he became headmaster. Fr. Peter had this gleam in his eyes when he saw me — it was as if he was looking at one of his own children.”

Chapter 6

Building a class

For a smallish third grader, the ride home from the Cistercian monastery in Irving seemed to be taking forever. His stomach was beginning to growl. As their car turned on to his tree-shaded street on this sunny April day in 1962, the boy stole another glance at the burly priest driving the car. Though the priest's accent sounded strange at first, his friendly attention and hearty laugh had made the testing seem fun and the boy feel smart.

"Steve performed very well on our tests," Fr. Damian Szödényi explained as he sat down with Mr. and Mrs. McAuliff in the living room of their University Park home. He looked over at Steve who sat fidgeting. "He is a bright boy, the kind who will do well in our new school."

Mr. and Mrs. McAuliff were impressed with Fr. Damian's appraisal of their son and with

his description of a school based on European *gymnasia* (schools for grades 5 - 12), which prepare above-average boys for the best universities.

The McAuliffs had sent their older sons to the local parochial school, Christ the King, and then to Jesuit for high school. But they were eager to give this new school a try. They hoped it might answer some of the nagging questions Americans were asking themselves in the spring of 1962 about an educational system that appeared weak in math and science. After all, how else did the blasted Russians find their way into space ahead of us? Maybe these Hungarian monks were on to something.

"Our new school," Fr. Damian emphasized with an easy manner, his eyes twinkling, "is for special boys who will one day become leaders in the community." Steve's curiosity was piqued. The McAuliffs were sold.



Students arrive early at Merici Hall for classes. In the first six years, admissions tests were administered individually. Members of the Classes of '70 and '71 took their tests at the monastery in Irving. Students testing for the Classes of '72, '73 and about half of the Class of '74 took their admissions tests at Merici Hall.

“Like all of the early families, my parents took a huge gamble,” emphasized Steve McAuliff ’71 years later. “There was not even a school building yet. All Fr. Damian had to show was the abbey.

“But he was very persuasive.”

Testing consisted of an IQ test, some problem solving, and Fr. Damian’s personal assessment.

“I have a feeling,” recalled Daniel Csányi (now a layman living in South Bend, IN), “that the tests were read with some latitude because, at least in my original Pre-form class (Class of ’71), there were some noticeable extremes in terms of both innate talent and actual readiness for fourth-grade work.”

The stated goal of selecting only “talented boys” would take time to develop into reality. In the meantime, it

would help to attract parents who wanted (and hoped for) the best for their sons.

With the parochial schools overburdened with baby boomers, the new school and the Cistercians’ impressive history managed to attract a significant number of applications that first year, primarily from Christ the King (which supplied the lion’s share), St. Monica, St. Rita, and Holy Trinity.

Admissions procedures would be streamlined after Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy assumed the duties as headmaster in the spring of 1969. First, he elected to eliminate the Pre-Form year (thereby canceling admissions for the 1969-70 school year). The following year, the IOWA tests were administered on a single date to a roomful of applicants (mostly for the Class of ’78). Rides



Fr. Damian Szödényi believed that admissions tests should be administered personally.

home were not offered. The procedure has not changed greatly since.

On an afternoon in April of 1971, a Honda 100 CL could be heard pattering in the abbey parking lot. Off hopped 15-year-old Jim Bloodgood, a freshman at Cary Junior High in Dallas.

Bloodgood's parents had pulled their second son out of Cistercian the year before, not in protest but due to family finances. Their oldest son, Mark in the Class of '72, would stay at Cistercian while Jim mingled with the 2-3,000 students at Cary. There, the younger brother gained a new appreciation for Cistercian. He waited for spring to make his case to Fr. Denis.

April of 1971 found Fr. Denis at the conclusion of his second year as headmaster. The school's fate continued to teeter, as if on the edge of precipice. The sudden change from Fr. Damian's easy-going style to Fr. Denis' laser sharp style caused many to take a hard look at the school's future and their sons' future.

Under Fr. Damian, the parents felt they had an empathetic ear at the school; they could exert some kind of influence over events. Under the new headmaster, their influence evaporated. They ran into a stone wall. Fr. Denis would create the school, from this point forward, based on what he expected the school to be, not what others expected it to be.

In Bloodgood, Fr. Denis was sitting face-to-face with a boy who desperately wanted to be part of the Cistercian Fr. Denis was creating. He represented all he had been working for.

"I'd like to come back to Cistercian," he said.

"What do your parents say?" Fr. Denis asked.

"They don't know I'm here," Bloodgood said apologetically.

Fr. Denis knew the situation and knew the boy's impressive work ethic and talents with all things mechanical. "We have some work around the school

that you could do," said the headmaster after a pause.

Bloodgood became the first Cistercian student to begin earning his way through Cistercian. He worked inside and he worked outside. He worked after school and he worked on weekends. This was all, of course, in addition to the work he already performed for his family's business of distributing papers in the morning (and some additional work in his father's engraving business).

"What about my motorcycle," Bloodgood asked, knowing that Fr. Denis did not allow motorcycles at school.

"Park it at the abbey," he smiled.



Jim Bloodgood '74 returned to Cistercian after spending his freshman year at Cary Junior High in Dallas. Fr. Denis created a "work-study" program to pay for his tuition.

Robert Newkirk '84 was introduced to Cistercian through music. Local guitarist Paul Ruiz '84 and his band mates would practice in the gym when they had permission. Having moved recently from Hudson, Ohio to Irving, Texas, Newkirk had been enrolled in MacArthur High School. He was unhappy to have left Ohio and his friends, and he began associating with a rough crowd in Irving.

"I was struggling at MacArthur," Newkirk remembered. "I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, and getting into mischief. Cistercian seemed like a healthier place to go."

By the spring of 1981, he approached Fr. Bernard about being admitted to Cistercian.

"Why are you interested in coming to Cistercian?" asked the school's newly appointed headmaster.

"I have nowhere else to turn," Newkirk answered. Years later, he remembered feeling "the world was closing in on me."

"At that moment, by the grace of God," Newkirk said, "I experienced Cistercian and the heart of Christ."

"I believe in you," Fr. Bernard said, "If you agree to some boundaries, I will see to it that you are given an opportunity."

Fr. Bernard wasn't taking a big gamble. The first attempt to expand enrollment in 1976 had failed. In

the years between 1978 and 1984, the school had been lucky to graduate over 20 students a few times.

In the spring of 1981, the sophomore class for the following September would number just 17.

That number included another unexpected applicant from MacArthur High School the previous summer. That's when York M. ("Smokey") Briggs, a transplant and a son of divorce, picked Cistercian out of a directory and took the admissions test.

But in addition to the need of the school, Fr. Bernard found applicants like Newkirk and Briggs irresistible. Fr. Bernard, after all, had been just like them after his first year at Irving High School. He felt out of place. He had been given the opportunity to move from Irving to Jesuit. He knew how this kind of move could change a young life.

"I often share with friends and colleagues," Newkirk said, "how my life was changed for the better by a small private Catholic preparatory school in the Dallas suburbs run by Hungarian priests."

"Were you forced to go?" they often ask.

"No," Newkirk responds, "it was my choice."

"Were you disciplined or treated harshly?"

"No," he says, "there were healthy boundaries, but I was treated with dignity, respect and love."

"Were you forced to become Catholic?"

"No, I was introduced to what a Christian life looks like."

"That's when I share that Cistercian taught me about fruitful and authentic relationships (sharing joy, challenges, pain, difficulty, growth and acceptance) as well as character, values, and goals.

"Cistercian is a process," Newkirk suggested, "a way of relating, a way of life."

Juana Gomez saw something special in the energetic kindergartner at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic School near Love Field in Dallas. Little

Alejandro Torres clowned around a bit, but Mrs. Gomez could see he had a bright mind that needed to be challenged. So the teacher's aid offered him extra work; Alejandro consumed it as if his mind were starving. Gomez made a note.

Four years later, Mrs. Gomez pulled Alejandro's mother aside.

"Why don't you test Alejandro for Cistercian?" Gomez asked Angelica Torres. "It is a very good school and would offer great opportunities for Alejandro."

"I have never heard of Cistercian," Torres replied.

"The priests and the faculty are just wonderful; they care so much for the boys," explained Gomez.

"Where is it?" asked Mrs. Torres.

Gomez suggested they drive out to campus for the 1999-00 Book Fair. After a tour of the school, Mrs. Gomez introduced the Torres family to Fr. Peter.

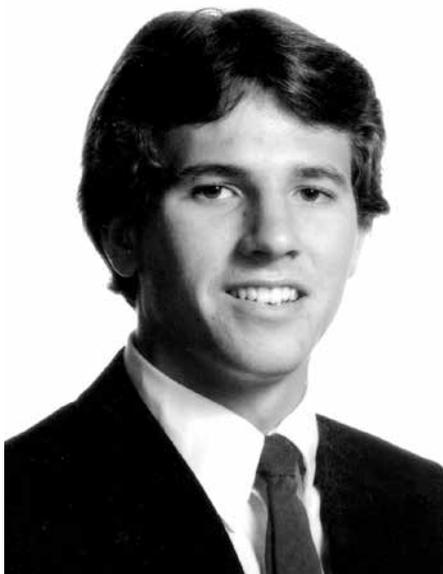
The Torres' were not the first family Mrs. Gomez had introduced to Cistercian, and it wouldn't be the last. As the parent of two Cistercian graduates (Angel '91 and Carlos '99), Mrs. Gomez knew firsthand the kind of opportunities Cistercian affords its students.

Angel Gomez serves as the medical director of the Jesse Owens Urgent Care Clinic Phoenix. The Gomez family first heard about Cistercian from the

Cruz family (George '91) who learned about Cistercian from the Barbero family (Ignacio '88, Luis '91, and Gustavo '93).

"Word-of-mouth is the primary way prospective families hear about Cistercian," said Bob Haaser, Cistercian's long-time director of admissions, who remains active in the process as a member of the Admissions Committee. "We do not advertise or promote heavily; it's not the way the Cistercian fathers do things." It also is unseemly, Mr. Haaser pointed out, to promote Cistercian at schools that run through eighth grade.

The word-of-mouth approach appears to be sufficient these days, especially when supplemented



Robert Newkirk '84 was accepted at Cistercian after a year of getting into trouble at MacArthur High School. He believes it changed his life.

occasionally with that most powerful form of advertising: press coverage. In September 1999, *D Magazine* reviewed Dallas-area private schools.

“What sets Cistercian apart,” the story stated, “are the extremely high — even by private school standards — academic programs. And the monks.”

The magazine also made note of Cistercian’s unique Form Master system and praised the faculty. “With 76 percent of teachers having earned a master’s degree and the other 24 percent a doctorate, they are the most educated staff of any school interviewed.”

The faculty also is, more than likely, the most committed. On average, teachers at Cistercian stay on board for 13 years. Even if you don’t count the monks, the average tenure of a Cistercian teacher is 10 years. “Teaching at Cistercian becomes a vocation for most of us,” said Mr. Haaser.

The school’s growing reputation has swelled the number of applicants over the last decade. Since 1996, only 45-50 percent of the entry-level applicants have been offered places. The students come from a broad swath of geography including six counties (Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, and Tarrant) and 23 cities and towns.

The final Saturday of January and the first Saturday of February bring prospective students to campus for admissions testing. While the boys submit themselves to nearly four hours of testing, the parents take tours led by Cistercian seniors and visit with Fr. Peter, who conducts a comprehensive discussion of the school’s policies and goals.

For the director of admissions, the two testing days mark the beginning of the end of the admissions process, and more specifically, the seemingly endless string of tours. Between September and December, two

to five families receive personal tours of the campus each week.

In addition to the tours and any other assigned chores, the director of admissions spends the fall answering questions at numerous “high school nights” at various private and parochial schools. Throughout the fall he also processes applications. (The order in which applications are received has absolutely no bearing on admissions.)

“My mom was afraid I wouldn’t pass the test,” remembered Alejandro Torres ’08. “I was pretty



Second Formers (l-r) Ian McLaughlin '08, Alejandro Torres '08, Daniel Box '08, and Richard Newcomb '08 in the fall of 2001.

nervous, too. I did all right, I guess.”

“We know the kids are tense when they arrive for the testing,” said Mr. Haaser. “But we try to put them at ease.”

The testing begins with an aptitude test and is followed by the IOWA achievement test.

Cistercian — which has used the same test since the school was founded in 1962 — is one of the few schools in the Metroplex to employ the IOWA test as an admissions tool. “By using the same tests for so long, the school has a means of comparing classes over the years,” explained Mr. Haaser. “In addition to using it for admissions, we use the IOWA tests to measure the



An ad hoc meeting of the admission committee in 2001 included all three members at the time: (l-r) Fr. Bernard Marton, Headmaster Fr. Peter Verhalen '73, and Bob Haaser, a staff and faculty member since 1969.

achievements of each grade through Middle School.”

The Independent School Entrance Examination, which is used by many other schools, magnifies differences in achievement. It can differentiate between two students who, for example, may have identical national percentile scores on the IOWA test.

“The IOWA test serves our purposes well,” said Mr. Haaser. “While it doesn’t pinpoint the absolute smartest boys, it helps us determine if a student is capable of doing the work at Cistercian.”

As long as a fourth-grade student tests at or above 80 percentile on the IOWA test, “we know he has solid skills that we can build on,” said Mr. Haaser. “Older boys need increasingly higher skills to blend into their Form at Cistercian.”

The final written part of the testing is a brief descriptive or narrative essay. The intent is to give the students a chance to provide a sample of their writing style, writing mechanics, and creativity. Fr. Peter, who has been a longtime member of the Admissions Committee, recalled one essay in particular.

“It was a description of a boy’s favorite place, a little hollow in a creek in his neighborhood,” remembered Fr. Peter. “He described the creek, the crawdads, and the overhanging trees. His essay conveyed a sense of detail, an attentive eye, and a very peaceful spirit.”

An informal interview and observation concludes

the testing data. The applicants are normally broken into groups of 15-20 students and are supervised by Cistercian faculty members. In addition to administering the tests, the teachers are asked to rate the boys on various traits and to note details of each boy’s behavior, both during the testing and during the breaks. The teacher tries to communicate with each boy and observes their behavior with the other boys and with the Cistercian seniors who take the students on a walking tour of the campus.

The testing criteria appear to be working. Over the past 10 years, approximately 50 percent of Cistercian seniors have been named either National Merit Semi-Finalist or Commended Students.

(Semi-finalists rank in the top half of one percent of test takers in Texas; Commended students rank in the top 5 percent of test takers in the state.)

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Dr. Tarek Souryal, who served as Cistercian’s team physician for most of the century’s first decade. “From my perspective, having spent 15 years as a team physician at sporting events from high school to the pros, I can say that football is football ... until you get to Cistercian.”

“There is not an unkind word on the sideline,” Dr. Souryal said, “not a bad word. When an opposing player is knocked down on our sidelines, our guys help him up. I find it very refreshing. Coach Hillary set the tone; he knew how these young men should carry themselves. And that has carried on with Coach McCarthy.”

“I knew when my son (Sam Souryal ’09) came of age,” he said, “I wanted him to go to Cistercian. Even though we are Methodist, I knew this was the right kind of environment for my son.”

The character of Cistercian students extends well beyond the playing field.

“I think it gave me a kind of spiritual identity,” said Daniel McSwain ’01. “I was unafraid of getting lost in

the crowd at college and or just going along with the herd. Cistercian gave me morals and beliefs that I could stick to.”

“I have heard the parents of several girls say that they don’t worry when their daughters are out with Cistercian boys. They are confident they will treat their daughters with care and respect,” said Christie Sparks, mother of Wheeler ’02.

Another parent, Carol Chapman, mother of Carson ’09, spoke from personal experience. “When I was a high school student,” she said, “I found it was a pleasure to spend time with Cistercian boys. Most were creative, witty, and very respectful of girls. They made you feel special when you were out with them. They treated me and my friends very well.”

The character of Cistercian students starts at home with families who are committed to giving their son a strong foundation for adulthood and who are willing to sacrifice a little to do so.

“Cistercian is not very effective if the parents

Bob Haaser served as director of admissions from 1996 to 2010, tirelessly working to select “interested and interesting” boys who would blend harmoniously into the community.

are farming out their children,” Fr. Abbot Denis commented. “But, if you want to participate in your son’s formation and education, if you embrace the same values that we have, plus you would like to have our expertise in promoting those values, and providing a high level of academic challenge for your son, I would say, well, probably there is no other place.”

“There are a number of well-known private schools in Dallas,” said Lori Haley, mother of David ’06 and Connor ’09. “When we moved to Dallas from Fort Worth, those other schools seemed to be obvious choices. But after visiting Cistercian,” she said, “I sensed that it had a spiritual side. It is so different than the school he attended in Fort Worth and the private schools near us.”

“When you move from outside of Dallas, so many people are oriented towards the older institutions. Everyone kept saying, ‘If you can get in, go there.’ That made it a more difficult decision,” Mrs. Haley admitted. “But looking back, I can’t believe I hesitated; Cistercian was such a perfect fit for David.”

“The parents at Cistercian are so involved with their kids,” she added. “Almost everyone makes some kind of sacrifice to go to Cistercian. Despite the fact that it



may be farther from their home, despite the fact that it may not have all the bells and whistles, families choose Cistercian because they value excellent academics and a high moral base. Those shared values bring the parents at Cistercian together; it is a common thread."

"At football games," said Dr. Souryal, "the stands are full of families. There are volunteers, faculty, and alumni standing on the sidelines. It gives you a real warm feeling to see how the community interacts."

"I think a big part of the character of Cistercian boys is that they discuss ethics," said Christie Sparks. "Wheeler told me that they discuss fatherhood and manhood. They read the C.S. Lewis books and discuss important moral issues."

"Plus, the priests model that character, they help work out problems, and they pray for the boys," Mrs. Sparks continued. "It is one of the few schools in the Metroplex to offer a classic Christian education."

As director of admissions for The Lamplighter School in Dallas between 1967 and 2001, Dolores Evans observed over her tenure how perceptions of Cistercian occasionally differed from the reality.

"Cistercian is a very warm place but it is not always perceived that way," she said. "Some perceive it as strict and harsh. What I see is that there is a real connection between the boys and the priests."

That connection between the boys and the faculty starts with the form master, a faculty member who serves as caretaker, taskmaster, and champion of a class from their first year at Cistercian until their last. Most form masters have led at least one class through the eight-year cycle, so they bring experience and perspective to the job of developing boys. By Upper School, the form master's knowledge of and bond with

the boys proves invaluable.

"I see the form master system as a real strength for Cistercian," said Dr. Elena Hines, principal of St. Rita Catholic School. "They just know boys and they make themselves very available. It means a lot to have someone who really knows your boy's strengths and weaknesses. They build a real feeling of community."

"These people have devoted their lives to teaching boys," said Lori Haley. "I don't think there could be a

more dedicated faculty than the one at Cistercian. When we chose Cistercian, it was not about the facilities, it was about who was going to be teaching our sons."

Hard work also builds character.

Mrs. Sparks remembered Coach Hillary taking her son Wheeler aside several years ago. "He said, 'If you need time off, let me know. Studies are more important than football.'"

Academics are clearly the top priority at Cistercian where virtually every Upper School course is an honors course. During their senior year, Cistercian students take college courses in calculus, history, English and science. Many place out of their freshman year, even at colleges like Stanford.

"Sometimes, my son complained that he didn't have a life, but the hard work

became a way of life," Mrs. Sparks said. "He knew he would have several hours of work a night. He learned how to juggle lots of activities. It forced the boys to manage their time and to find a balance between work, athletics, extracurricular activities, and a social life."

"We're looking for interested and interesting boys," said Mr. Haaser, who served as admissions director from 1995 – 2010. "In addition to finding academically



Alejandro Torres '08, who came to Cistercian from Our Lady of Perpetual Help, poses with his mom and dad prior to graduation. A Yale graduate and a Gates Millennium Scholar, he plans to attend medical school.

talented students we would very much like to build a class with diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities.” As the number of applicants has grown, the Admissions Committee has had the luxury of selecting a diverse group of students.

It may seem strange that Catholic monks would dictate diversity, especially religious diversity. “We are a Catholic school, but we like to maintain the percentage of non-Catholics between 25 and 35 percent,” said Mr. Haaser.

The school welcomes all faiths, from Protestants and Hindus to Jews and Muslims.

“The non-Catholics challenge the Catholics to think about, understand, and practice their faith,” said Fr. Peter. “Catholics and non-Catholics alike learn to take their faith seriously, to build a community on the shared essentials.”

The Admissions Committee makes its decisions without regard to economic factors.

“Finances should not be the final determinant in the decision to attend Cistercian,” said Fr. Bernard. “If we accept a student and the family cannot afford to pay part or all of the tuition, we attempt to help them.” Today, over 20 percent receive some form of financial aid.

“In times of an economic downturn, a family may need help for a year or two,” Mr. Haaser explained. “When parents feel they need help, they fill out forms for an independent analysis of economic need (Cistercian does not make initial judgments about those cases). So, if a layoff occurs, we often are able to help out.”

“When a boy is accepted to Cistercian, it is our hope that we are going to play a major role in his development right up to graduation. If economic factors arise that might threaten that goal, then the school

stands ready to help,” he added.

Taking over as director of admissions from Fr. Peter in 1996, Mr. Haaser saw it as his mission to bring in boys with a wide range of interests, to build a class of diversity.

“I made it a point to find academically talented boys who had strong interests outside of school, whether in music, art, athletics, chess, coin collecting, scouts, or reading,” Mr. Haaser said. “I wanted the boys to complement each other.”

Members of the Admissions Committee read every file independently and make personal notes about each candidate. In addition to the testing data, committee members review scores on other standardized tests to spot any inconsistencies.

They review grades, teacher evaluations, and recommendations to flesh out the boy’s character, how he functions in the classroom, how he relates to others, his attitude, motivations, and creativity.

“Finally, we look for talents and activities that the boy may have to better fit into an already existing Form or into the many opportunities offered at Cistercian,” Mr. Haaser said.

“Our Admissions Committee is really first class,” said Mr. Haaser.

“Fr. Peter was director of admissions for five years before me and Fr. Bernard held that position for 12 years before him. Both have been headmaster.”

“That’s a lot of experience and accumulated wisdom,” Mr. Haaser beamed.

“You made a mistake,” explained Fr. Abbot to cardiologist Dr. Steve Johnston ’71, shaking his head



Prior to becoming headmaster, Fr. Paul McCormick served as director of admissions for two years and applied his organizational and marketing talents to help attract more underrepresented groups (especially Hispanics). He also worked to computerize the application files, and is reviewing plans to initiate on-line applications and registration.

gravely. The simple diagnosis was delivered to the good doctor in the Abbot's customarily blunt fashion. The doctor knew instantly the patient was correct.

Johnston had moved his family out to the country south of Dallas. They were enjoying the simple life, but something was missing. The antidote?

"You should send your son to Cistercian," Fr. Abbot said. He pulled an application from his pocket and handed it to Johnston.

"I went home that night and told my wife that it was time we apply to Cistercian," Johnston said. "I had been working with Fr. Abbot and the other Cistercian priests for 12 years. He knew how I felt. He knew that there was something missing in my life. He knew it was Cistercian."

There is good news for alumni whose sons apply to Cistercian. And there is bad news. The good news is that, as legacies, sons of alumni receive the first look in the admissions decision process. The bad news is that if the son of an alumnus is not a good fit at Cistercian, there will not be any hesitation in denying him admission. It makes those three weeks in February waiting for a decision especially difficult for alums.

"The hardest calls I have had to make have been those to alums whose sons were not a good match," said Mr. Haaser. "If we are not a good fit for these boys, we will not accept them."

The same "good news, bad news" holds true for families who already have a son at Cistercian, since siblings receive the second look in the process.

Having 34 years of experience sending Lamplighter students to Cistercian through 2001, Dolores Evans noted, "The folks at Cistercian will not take a boy if he's not right; they are strong enough to say no. They are not going to bring in boys who cannot be successful. They are looking for the right things."

"Conversely," Mrs. Evans said, "when a boy is accepted to Cistercian, they are going to be successful most of the time. They are really good at that. They take on the boy and the family."

Dr. Angel Gomez '91 knows what Cistercian is going to mean to Alejandro Torres '08.

"Cistercian opened up a lot of doors for me," said Gomez, "and it will do the same for Alejandro. It is partly due to the reputation of Cistercian. Knowing it is a good school gave me a lot of confidence. I felt like I was getting a privileged education. And at Cistercian, the paths to colleges and a career will be mapped out

very well."

"When you go to Cistercian," he emphasized, "you are expected to be successful."

A little more than a year after having heard that he had been accepted to Cistercian, Alejandro Torres found himself sitting among his classmates at his first Closing Ceremonies.

"The day before, my dad had asked me if I expected to win any awards," Alejandro said. "I told him I didn't."

After all the academic awards had been handed out, Alejandro looked around. He was guessing which of his classmates would receive the prestigious St. Bernard Award for Form I. (The St. Bernard Award is given to the student in each class who best exemplifies the values of the school. The entire faculty elects the winners.)

The name of "Alejandro Torres" came over the loud speaker. "I just sat there for a couple of seconds. I was dumfounded. My classmates looked at me and told me to go up to the front."

While his Form I classmates cheered and clapped, Angelica Torres cried.

"I was so proud of him. I was so happy," she said. "I say, 'Thank you, thank you,' to God all the time for putting Alejandro in such a wonderful school. I believe He wants Alejandro for something."

Back at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Juana Gomez was smiling.

Chapter 7

Cistercian athletics

“What sport do you like to play,” a Cistercian monk asked the boys assembling on the meadow outside Merici Hall on a bright September morning in 1962. The priest, along with several of his Hungarian cohorts, hoped to make Cistercian’s first recess a success. The boys were ready to blow off some steam after being exposed to the school’s rigors for the first time.

“Football!” the boys screamed excitedly, almost in unison.

“You’ve never seen a group of grown men so giddy,” said David Dolan ’70, who remembered the reaction of the priests vividly. Quickly a monk retrieved a soccer ball from inside. The boys scratched their heads and looked at one another. This miscommunication on the school’s first day foreshadowed many to follow.

“Side-straddle hops now,” barked Dr. Emeric DeGall with a thick Hungarian accent. “Come on

boys!” As the school’s Physical Education teacher, he was putting the white-clad Cistercian students through their paces on the old tennis court located southwest of Merici Hall.

The former Hungarian fencing champion boasted a still-muscular, though slightly over-fed physique, curly white-blond locks, and a chiseled, ruddy face bespectacled with the black horned-rimmed glasses that were fashionable in those days.

Dressed in ever-present black pants with a whistle hanging over his white T-shirt, he made an Olympic effort to fit into the American athletic scene.

In fact, at the school’s very first faculty meeting in September 1962, he “raised the question of football.” The minutes recorded a terse response. “Only soccer will be offered.” American-style football was banned from campus until a parents’ committee led by Leslie

Pritchett intervened.

During basketball season, they played on the estate's old tennis court. "Just try to throw the ball at the backboard," he suggested to the basketball-challenged boys among them.

Primarily, Dr. DeGall stuck to soccer and fencing, European sports he knew well.

"Since soccer was new to most of the kids," remembered Daniel Csányi recently, "they instinctively played it more like rugby with a round ball."

"Carrying his heft with surprising agility," Csányi said, "Dr. DeGall would run alongside the field, following the ball and yelling at the players, 'Don't



During one of the first recess periods at the new school, the Cistercians were delighted to learn that the young American boys wanted to play football. The misunderstanding soon became apparent to the boys and the monks. Note the brand new uniforms and the inconsistent level of interest on the part of the boys.

keek it vit your hend, keek it vit your foot!"

The lion's share of the sports budget was consumed by fencing foils, chest protectors, and masks. Out amidst the natural majesty of Merici Hall's grounds, DeGall's French-laced instructions led the masked Cistercian students to perform a lunge before recoiling to the *en garde* position.

Several Cistercian students of this period went on to fencing success in high school.

But while fencing captured Dr. DeGall's heart, he introduced another sport, perhaps inadvertently, that instantly won over the Cistercian boys, who were hungry for a more instinctive activity.

The first edition of *The Nest* noted, "Besides fencing, Dr. DeGall has taught us to play Medicine Ball. Sides are chosen and some exciting games are played."

The game eventually garnered the name bombardment, which captured its spirit and import.

"Those monstrously heavy leather things proved anything but medicinal" remembered Brian Melton '71, "My nose is still sideways."

Head injuries declined dramatically when volleyballs were substituted for the medicine balls.

When the weather turned rainy or cold, Dr. DeGall put the boys through their paces in the

gymnasium on the third floor of Merici, where the boys would pound the floor with the medicine balls in hopes of disturbing the class below. An occasional rumble took place there as well.

Dr. DeGall maintained discipline with the flick of his wrist; using either his foil, a quick whip across the back of the legs would do, or his whistle, which was used to "crack your cranium."

At the beginning of the 1965-66 school year (the first fall at the Irving campus), the Class of 1970 entered Fourth Form. While the Hungarians had initially believed they could steer the boys towards their brand of futbol, the draw of American

football proved too strong.

A football team was formed and a mascot selected. (The school colors were not a subject for discussion.)

Twenty-four out of approximately 40 Third and Fourth Formers joined the squad. In addition to the many fine athletes that would graduate with the Classes of 1970 and 1971, the team included a number of star athletes who would go elsewhere to play their high school football.

This latter group included four members of the Class of 1971: Mike Wunderlick and Paul Galvin, who would play at Jesuit, Sebastian Larreta, who played at a Chicago high school, and Larry Higgins who went on

to a stellar career at Bishop Lynch.

The team went 5-2, quite a successful campaign for the school's first foray into seventh-eighth grade football.

Nominations for the school mascot included (according to best recollections) the Hawks, Stingrays, Monks, and Monkeys (Fr. Damian's pet name for the students).

The Class of '73, the largest Middle School class in the seventies, included a great depth of athletes, and their eighth-grade team terrorized opponents. Among many others, it featured a head-hunting defensive end named Peter Verhalen. While the class suffered some attrition, a great number would go on to help the varsity during its inaugural season the following year.



Peter Smith '74 takes a hand-off from Terry Buell '73 in a 12-8 victory over Greenhill in the first game of the 1971 campaign. Note the spectators on the sideline. Bleachers would be erected in time for the 1972 homecoming game. The tradition of Friday night lights began on campus with the 1973 season.

Cistercian's varsity football team saw its first action in a game-conditions scrimmage during spring training, 1969. The Hawks prevailed 8-6 over Greenhill. The following fall, the Hawks faced the Trinity Valley Trojans in Fort Worth in their first official game.

"We strapped on our leather helmets and made Coach Coombes proud with the school's inaugural victory. Thereafter things got a little dicey with a string of defeats," Charlie Williams '70 said. "I recall thinking that a weight room, or actually a home field would be nice. Alas, we played all of our games on the road."

The boys showered in what is now the ladies

restroom on the first floor of the Middle School. Upon exiting the showers, they had little choice but to dress in the hallway.

According to our very unscientific poll, the greatest game of the seventies took place on October 14, 1972, a homecoming game vs. powerful Dallas Christian, which had never lost to Cistercian. Cistercian cheerleaders elected by the student body the previous spring graced the sidelines for the first time that year. Fans sat in bleachers, which had been completed just in time for this game.

Quarterback Terry Buell '73 (20 of 35 for 316 yards and four TDs) and receiver Tom Lewis '73 (two TDs of 53 and 65 yards) kept the Hawks close. Then with just 45 seconds remaining, Buell lofted a 13-yard pass to Peter Smith '74 for a 24-20 victory.

The school's gym, nearly complete, could be seen by players from the field. With the victory, the new bleachers, cheerleaders, and the nearly completed gym, everyone sensed a new level of pride in Cistercian athletics.

The next year, Bob Cahill was named head coach and athletic director. The Jesuit Hall-of-Famer brought a penchant for fundamentals, a strict work ethic (i.e., countless 40-yard wind sprints), and two or three straightforward running plays to Cistercian.

"Warren [Andres '77] was shuttling in a play from Coach Cahill," remembered Johnny

Nicholson '77 during his introduction of Andres as the 2004 Jim and Lynn Moroney Award winner. "By the time Warren arrived at the huddle, he looked at me blankly. 'I forgot the play.'"

"Since Coach Cahill never called a passing play," Nicholson laughed, "I took advantage of the situation and called one since I had the opportunity."

Bob Haaser, who first arrived at Cistercian in 1969, took over as head football coach for the 1977 season. It was rough going for the first couple of years. But the 1980 season saw a hardy group from the Class of 1981, many of whom had seen action as freshmen and sophomores, triumph with an 8-2 record (the best

record in Cistercian's eleven-year history) and the Texas Independent School Conference title.

Against Tyler Gorman in 1983, the Hawks were tied with just 10 seconds remaining and the ball on the 32-yard line. Greg O'Hagan '84 trotted out and hit the kick perfectly. The 47-yarder, the longest field goal in school history, capped off a 10-7 victory in which both O'Hagan and Kevin Spencer '85 ran for over 100 yards.

Cistercian's 2005 football season, under the direction of Coach Steve McCarthy, began to appear charmed when JV quarterback Connor Heard '08 was forced into action on passing downs against All Saints. Heard completed several clutch passes to Matthew Abola '07 for touchdowns that proved enough for a 19-0 win. Cistercian held All Saints to an astounding -23 yards of total offense for the night.

Cistercian's defense – anchored by linebackers Chase Campbell '07, Carlton Cornelius '07, and Kurt Klinke '06 – played superbly all year long, allowing an average of only 9.3 points per game (a school record).

Will Murchison '06 set the single-season rushing record behind the offensive line of Kyle Welch '07, George Morgan '06, Patrick Flanigan '07, Terrell Haines '06, and Mark Ratway '07.

When ESD arrived at Hawk Field in late October 2005, both teams had not lost a game in conference

play. ESD featured a highly touted, 6' 5", 225 lb. quarterback with a rifle arm, excellent speed, and an outstanding collection of receivers.

Cistercian's nickel defense, however, proved they were up to the task, collecting a total of six interceptions. ESD roared back from a 28-7 third-quarter deficit and had a chance to score late, but David Haley '06 came up with his third interception of the night to put the game away.

If fans thought it couldn't get any more exciting, they were wrong. The next week, Houston Episcopal held a 20-6 lead in the third frame. Cistercian was headed for defeat.

"That was truly a magical night," Coach McCarthy said of the Hawks' comeback that ended with a 27-20 overtime win. "You have to get some breaks, everything has to fall just right for us to win that one, and it did. It was really exciting."

After a 35-0 win over St. Stephen's in the Southwest Preparatory Conference (SPC) Division-II Championship the next week, the players, friends, and family celebrated the school's first undefeated season on the field for an hour afterwards.

Cistercian's track teams, like their counterparts in other sports, have seen highs and lows over the years. At Cistercian, where seniors enjoy half days during the second half of the spring semester, training for SPC becomes slightly more problematic (i.e., track team members must return to school for workouts after their noon dismissal). The phenomenon occasionally causes Cistercian's track coaches fits.

Nevertheless, Cistercian has seen some significant successes at SPC, especially in 2006, the same school year in which the football team recorded its first undefeated season. Coach Steve McCarthy's Hawks ran, jumped, and threw their way to a third-place finish at SPC,



The Hawks celebrated an SPC-II championship win over St. Stephens and the school's first undefeated varsity football season in 2005. The season featured exciting wins over ESD and Houston Episcopal. The team was led by a stingy defense, a powerful offensive line, and the running of Will Murchison '06.



Adam Martin '90 brings the baton home.

Varsity track records

400M Relay	Greg Wallingford David Haley Kerr Friedman Matthew Abola	43.7	2006
800M	Robert Patrizi	1:56.1	2000
110M HH	Alex Lopez	14.38	1989
100M	Alex Gette	10.68	2003
400M	Micheal Aird	49.5	1997
300M IH	Alex Lopez	38.8	1989
200M	Micheal Aird	21.9	1997
1600M	Robert Patrizi	4:32.7	2000
3200M	Chris Stewart	10:12.05	1989
1600M Relay	Matthew Abola Tom Davey David Haley Sam Bowler	3:23.27	2006
3200M Relay	Micheal Dorsey David Aird Cliff Arnold Robert Patrizi	8:20.01	1999
Shot Put	Martin Bartscht	48'5"	1981
Discus	Rod Walter	136'3"	1983
Long Jump	David Aird	22' 7 1/2"	2001
High Jump	James Sivco	6'8"	1991
Triple Jump	Spencer Bethmann	43' 4"	2003
Pole Vault	Trey Mohr	13' 7"	2005

tying for the best finish with the 2003 team.

They were led by David Haley '06 and Sam Bowler '06, who went on to run track at Duke, where he was elected a captain of the track team. The 4x100 team of Greg Wallingford '06, Haley, Kerr Friedmann '07, and Matthew Abola '07 set the school record at the Cistercian Relays with a 43.7 time. That narrowly beat the record set by the '03 team that featured Haley (then a freshman), Michael Tinker '03, Alex Gette '03, and Tyler Bethea '03.

The 4x400 team of Abola, Tom Davey '07, Haley, and Bowler set the school record in '06 with a time of 3:22.7, a hair faster than the 3:24.4 run by the '89 team that included Alex Lopez '89 and John Michael Stewart '89.

The fastest Hawk remains Alex Gette with a time of 10.68 in the 100m.

Soccer has had a fond place in the hearts of the Hungarian monks, especially Fr. Matthew Kovács. American football coaches and basketball coaches were not always amused by the "beautiful game." And at Cistercian, it hasn't always been pretty. But the Hawks have had their moments.

During the '70-'71 soccer season, Coach Pepe Dill led a Hawks team peppered with players from all four classes. In the second game of the season against Jesuit, the Hawks fought a strong wind and the talented Rangers to a 1-1 halftime tie. With the wind at their back after intermission, two freshmen took full advantage of the gusty conditions. Wing Joe Nicholson '74 took a pass from midfielder Adrian Lorrain '74, glided up to the left edge of the penalty area, and let go a shot.

Catching plenty of air allowed the wind to work its magic and urge the ball over the keeper's outstretched hands and into the far upper corner of the Jesuit net. The Hawks, who held on for a 2-1 win, had no idea that this would stand as one of the very few victories over Jesuit in the decades to come.

In 1977, three freshmen starters were helping the Hawks cruise into the second half of the season with just one loss to Jesuit. In their second game with the Rangers at Haggard Field, freshmen Paul Tomaso '80 and Todd Saayer (who did not graduate from Cistercian) scored along with Bruce Jilek '78 to help the Hawks pull out a 3-2 victory. The win put the icing on



The 1979-80 soccer team featured (back row, l-r) Coach Dwight Fletcher, Clayton Snyder '80, Murray Moore '80, Martinn Bartscht '81, Alex Caplazi '81, Tim O'Connor '81, Tom Strenk '82, asst. coach Brian Harvey (front row, l-r) Todd Sayles '80, Peter Collins '80, David Godat '80, Paul Tomaso '80, Chris Crawley '83, John Ruffing '80, and Gabe Kovats '80.

a 10-1-1 season.

The '88-'89 team rode the veteran leadership of eight senior starters to a spot in the Division 1 championship game against defending champion Greenhill. In a seesaw battle, the teams traded goals before the Hawks scored the game-winner to break Greenhill's streak of nine consecutive championships. This was Cistercian's only SPC Division I championship team.

At the 1993 SPC South Zone Tourney in Houston, the '92-'93 Hawks battled Episcopal Houston which was led by the two top offensive players in the SPC. Both teams entered the match undefeated in conference play. ESH dominated most of the rain-soaked game, but James Tinker '94 was frustrating their best playmaker. Then, around the 85th minute, Kyle Sommers '94 scored a miraculous goal on a shot (or was it a cross?). Coach Saeid Baghvardani's Hawks ended up in the SPC Division I Championship game that year, losing to Holland Hall, 1-0.

In 2009, the Hawks would defeat Oakridge in the Division-II championship game with a talented

team led by Ramon Cordova '09, Paul Pesek '09, Joe Graham '10, and Andy Burns '10.

In 2011, nobody saw a championship coming after a dismal regular season. But after the 15-minute mark of their second-round SPC game against favored Oakridge, things began to change.

Coach J.P. Walsh inserted Austin Burns '12 (normally a defender) to create havoc on the mid-field and George Adesanya '11 subbed into his familiar right attack position to complement Shane Macedonio '12 on the left. Both moves paid off, stifling the Owls' offense and sparking the Hawks to a 5-0 win. A corner from Pete Smith '11 to the head of Will Halle '11 decided the championship game and a highly unlikely championship.

For its first three years, varsity basketball was played at the University of Dallas (UD) gym before moving to campus in November 1972 after the completion of the school's gymnasium. The Hawks were led in the seventies by Coach Bill Coombes and

Coach Bob Patrizi. In January 1973, Cistercian played Greenhill in Memorial Auditorium. Patrizi led a bevy of talented players in the seventies and early eighties, including Jim Hartnett '75, Joe Glasheen '76, ,

The eighties and nineties brought continuing changes at the head coach position, from Mark Parachini, Don Farquhar, Mike Miller and David Rodriguez (now at Trinity Valley) to Mickey Dorn, Jeff Bontrager, and finally Dan Lee in 1996, who has brought 16 years of stability.

In a 1987-88 contest against ESD at Cistercian, things looked virtually hopeless with 10 seconds to go. The Eagles, boasting a front line of players 6'10", 6'5", and 6'3", had the Hawks down by three points. ESD had the ball but turned it over on an over-and-back violation. Matt Hawkins '88 promptly drilled a three-pointer to tie the ball game. The Hawks pressed and prevented ESD from inbounding the ball within the required five seconds. Hawks' ball. Hawkins inbounded the ball to Kent Wallace '89 who drained his 17-footer for a stunning victory. The ecstatic Cistercian fans erupted and rushed the floor.

At SPC in 1999 (in what would become Division II), Mike Brugge '99 tipped in a missed shot at the buzzer to beat Oakridge.

"It was very controversial," said Coach Dan Lee. "Later, the video tape showed that it had beaten the buzzer and the refs had made the correct call." The win was particularly satisfying since the Hawks had lost twice to Oakridge that year.

Our second buzzer-beater took place in the loud, hostile confines of the Trinity Valley gym early in February 2001. The Hawks fought from behind the entire night, unable to match the Trojans' three-point

shooting prowess. When David Aird '01 fouled out with four minutes remaining and the Hawks in an eight-point hole, things looked desperate.

But, led by Michael West '02, who made 12 of 12 free throws in the fourth quarter, the Hawks drew to a tie with 4 seconds left. Point guard Spencer Bethmann '03 took the inbounds- pass at the far end of the court, dribbled once, then whipped a long pass to Matt Truitt '03 who was standing just outside the three-point arc in the left corner. Truitt let it fly. When the ball splashed through the net, the Trinity Valley fans fell silent, watching in disbelief as the Hawks made a dog pile celebrating their win, Hawks 61, Trojans 58.

The construction of a new gym ("east gym") provided Cistercian's basketball programs with a great boost in 2003, allowing Third and Fourth Forms to practice simultaneously as well as the freshman, JV, and varsity far more room than in the past. The program grew quickly as well. Craig Sklar joined the coaching staff, serving as JV coach and assistant varsity coach.

In January 2008, Coach Lee was not optimistic about his team's chances against a very strong St. Mark's team that would end up in the Division-I championship

game. Then after sitting through the home team's lengthy "senior night" ceremonies, the Hawks found themselves in a huge hole at the end of the first quarter, 26-14.

"I wonder if we're going to give up a hundred tonight," Lee whispered to Sklar on the bench.

But the Hawks had an even bigger second quarter (28-10) than the Lions' first. The half ended with Charlie Hoedebeck '08 hitting a three-pointer to put the Hawks out front, 42-36. Behind five double-digit



Dean Henigsmen '80 shoots over a block attempt by a Dallas Christian player during the '78-79 season. The Hawks also were led by Mike Donohoe '80 and Owen Hannay '81.

scorers – Daniel Stewart '08 (16), Hoedebeck (13), Giancarlo Carleo '09 (12), Addison White '09 (11), and Max Tenney '09 (10) – the Hawks cruised to a comfortable 83-71 victory.

“That one really felt good,” Lee smiled.

“I overheard some of you talking outside my office,” Coach Tom Hillary said as he eyed his first team of Cistercian players in August of 1984. At 6'6" and 240



Coach Tom Hillary became athletic director and head football coach in 1984. A three-sport stand-out at SMU in the early sixties (and the last three-sport letterman there), he brought to Cistercian a big-time program approach that bred winners on and off the gridiron.

pounds, this monument of a man commanded their attention effortlessly. More than a very fit-looking coach, he stood with the presence of a player, a real player. Hillary had starred at SMU in the early sixties, where he lettered and played key roles on the football, basketball, and baseball teams.

“You were saying, ‘We’ll lose to Dallas Christian, Trinity Valley will be tough, we’ll beat Fort Worth Christian, Greenhill is too strong ...’”

David Patrick '86, a junior that year, remembered embarrassed looks all around. “He didn’t name any names,” Patrick recalled. “He didn’t have to. We all had expressed those same feelings at one time or another.”

“The Cistercian Hawks,” Coach Hillary said forcefully, as if his words could turn back a tide of doubts, “do not go into any football game thinking they can’t win.”

As the weeks of that first season wore on, these words would be reinforced with deeds. Consistently. Coach Hillary, the boys began to believe, was incapable of uttering a hollow word.

“We knew he was the real deal from our first meeting,” said Kevin Spencer '85, a team captain during the 1984 season.

“He made a point of meeting with the seniors prior to summer practices,” said Spencer. “He wanted to know how we felt about the upcoming year, what our goals were. He asked us what we wanted out of our last season of football.” The message: This is your team, seniors; I expect you to lead it. The louder, though unspoken message: I believe in you.

Members from fifteen more senior classes would be given the same charge. These messages formed the essence of Coach Hillary’s coaching philosophy. He strove to shape boys into men by trusting them and giving them a chance to lead. Coach Hillary’s goals transcended football seasons and reached into boys’ lives. The field served as the classroom for these life lessons; Coach Hillary served as both teacher and textbook.

“I think the most important leadership

trait that Coach taught and that made him so special was how much he cared for each and every one of us,” said Chris Carlson ’85, a captain of the 1984 team and a graduate of the United States Naval Academy.

“Coach Hillary cared so much for his players that you did not want to make a mistake, not because he would yell or scream, but because he was giving his best and you wanted to do the same,” he added.

“His consistently outstanding example as a coach gave us a model to follow” said Robert Schoenvogel ’96, a captain during the ’95 season. “Whether at the beginning of two-a-days or during the last minute of the big game, Coach Hillary was the same coach, and this was what made him so special. He towered above everything and never wavered. I was an Eagle Scout,” added this 1996 Davey O’Brien Award recipient,



Coach Hillary trusted his seniors with the leadership of their teams. Four of the seniors from the 1988 squad (l-r) are Peter Anastopulos ’89, Stefan Thiele ’89, Jason Van Donk ’89, and Alex Lopez ’89.

“but Coach Hillary probably taught me more about leadership than my six years in the Boy Scouts.”

“The lessons he taught, the character he instilled, the leadership he portrayed were far more important than the fact that we went 6-4 and won a playoff game,” echoed Tim Bock ’85, another one of the captains during Coach Hillary’s first year at CPS. “He helped me develop into what I am today.”

The implications of Coach’s trust in his seniors did not escape them. “He taught me the ability to have faith in myself, while having the strength to rely on others,” Spencer said.

Coach Hillary’s commitment to shaping leaders and his unconditional trust in them spawned strong

relationships throughout his teams. Respect spread from the coach to the seniors and from the seniors to underclassmen. What Cistercian teams lacked in size, speed, and talent, they made up for in confidence, leadership, and team chemistry. Hillary’s Hawks entered every game believing they could win.

During the summer of 1989, Coach Hillary met with his seniors to discuss the coming season. Nearly 70 percent of the starters from the previous year had been lost to graduation or injury. Although he always preached confidence, here before practices began, he was honest with the team’s leaders.

According to John DiPasquale ’90, one of the ’89 captains, Hillary expressed to them “a slight hint of reservation” about the team’s prospects. But this did not alter his expectations for his seniors. “Lead the team to perform its best,” he said.

“He also expressed his commitment not to use the season as simply a rebuilding year but to go all out to beat the odds that were stacked against us,” DiPasquale recalled.

“After those conversations in the summer, I never heard him talk about our weaknesses again, only our strengths. It was his belief in us that kept us together as a team during one of the toughest seasons that Cistercian has ever had.”

“We wanted to play for him,” remembered Chris Stewart ’91, a junior during the 1989 season who would serve as a captain the following year. “Why? Because

he invested so much in us. I remember wondering why he did that. I mean, he could see in the off-season, when we would go in there to lift weights, that none of us were football players.”

“During that 2-8 season I think we were upset more for him than for ourselves when we lost. It was simple: We did not want to let him down because he was so dedicated to us.”

“I remember every Monday Coach Hillary would give us the synopsis on the upcoming team,” Stewart recalled. “Always the upcoming opponent was — in coach’s words — bigger, stronger, faster and more talented. He would state, ‘We play these guys 10 times, we win two... let’s make it one of those two.’ Not great

odds, but I remember always feeling as if we had a chance.”

Only rarely did Coach Hillary lose his temper during that trying season. DiPasquale recalls one instance in particular, during a game against a much larger and more talented Houston Episcopal team.

“They were running all over us and beating us by over 30 points at the half. During halftime, Coach laid into us as I had never seen before because he knew we could do better. We played them close to even in the second half. It was the best half of



Coach Tom Hillary knew football, but he knew even more about teaching young men to grow as leaders.

football we played that year.”

“After the game, Coach came up to me in the trainer’s room as I was lying there in complete exhaustion,” DiPasquale said. “He told me how proud he was of how we played.”

Although the losses began to stack up that season, “we never once got down on ourselves,” said DiPasquale. “Coach taught me how to lead in difficult circumstances, and those lessons have served me well ever since.”

Coming into the final game of the season, the

Hawks had earned just one victory in nine games.

“There was no way he was going to let us lose that last game against TMI (Texas Military Institute),” Stewart said. “It was Homecoming.” For the occasion, Coach Hillary altered his normal Monday synopsis.

“We play these guys once,” he told the team. “We win once.”

“He made it clear that there was no other option,” said Stewart. “When we came in the locker room on Friday before the game, there were flyers on everyone’s locker that read in big letters, ‘WE WILL WIN.’ There was absolutely no question in our minds that we were going to win that game, even if we were overmatched on paper. And we did. Coach instilled that confidence in us and it carried over to the next year.” The Hawks would suffer through just one other losing season during Coach Hillary’s tenure.

“We played for him,” emphasized Stewart, “and he coached for us.”

Between 1984 and April 2000, Coach Hillary’s teams had created a reputation in athletics that paralleled Cistercian’s lofty academic standards. “You hear it all the time,” said Steve McCarthy, Cistercian’s varsity football coach who succeeded the legend. “Cistercian teams play with class.”

That reputation was validated when Coach Hillary was named one of the two head coaches for the first annual DFW All-Star Classic in 1999. (That game, which showcases the area’s top private school players, is now named for him.) “He never talked about it,” said Wyatt Maxwell, “but it must have made him happy.”

It also would have made him happy had he been able to listen in as Fr. Peter discussed the school’s athletic programs. Fr. Peter told prospective Form I parents in January 2000, “Referees and parents from opposing teams regularly praise the sportsmanship of Cistercian athletes under Coach Hillary.” He added that Hillary’s teams play with class. “‘Class’ means playing smart, playing tough, and playing with exemplary sportsmanship. Coach Hillary does not tolerate cursing or fighting from his players.”

The program had come a long way in his 16 years. That much struck David Patrick, on a visit to the school in September 1999.

“The weight room, locker rooms, and other facilities were amazing,” he said. “but the boys impressed me the most. They showed so much heart and class in

their play and the way they carried themselves. While watching the game tapes they demonstrated more knowledge of the game than many of my teammates and I had. It was clear that what Coach Hillary had started to build while I was there had grown into something very special.”

That something special was showcased on October 8, 1999, in a contest against cross-town rival Greenhill. Never had the Hornets appeared more



David Aird '01 took this pass from Jonathan Reinemund '00 and raced into the end zone with two minutes to play to seal an improbable 20-17 win over Greenhill on October 8, 1999. It would be one of the most memorable games in Hillary's years.

invincible. Undefeated and ranked number three among the area's private school teams, Greenhill ran a no-huddle offense that was thrashing opponents. The Hornet quarterback told *The Dallas Morning News*, "I really don't think we can be stopped." The Hawks limped into the match with just one win under their belt against three losses.

"Of the four years I played for Coach," Wyatt Maxwell '00 said, "that week before Greenhill was the hardest week of practice ever."

"Coach told us it would be the toughest game we would play, and he told us the odds weren't in our favor," remembered Maxwell. "But he told us if we played with heart, if we played every minute, all out, leaving it all out on the field, the best game of our lives, we could win. He said they were good, but he also said they were beatable. He was right on both accounts."

As the tide began to turn and the Hawks grounded the Hornets' high-flying attack, frustration began to set in on the far sideline. It was a different story on the Cistercian bench, even as the outcome still hung in the balance.

"You looked at our sideline," Maxwell said, "and you saw a man who you took pride in. He was intimidating, but silently so; he kept his cool." With just two minutes to go, the Hawks scored to pull off an unlikely 20-17 win.

"I cannot describe the incredible feeling. We cried, Coach cried, our fans and parents cried. Coach told us he doesn't rank games but he said that this game was one of the best, if not the best. It was up in the air, literally until the last second, and everyone, me, my buds, my dad, and coaches still get goose bumps.

"And Coach told us to enjoy it. When we sang our [victory] song that night in the locker room, with Coach there, it was the pinnacle of good times. We sang so loud, so proud that we sang it twice.

"Coach was so happy."

(Coach Hillary died from adult acute myeloid leukemia on Monday, April 10, 2000, just five months after his final game.)

Spring sports suffer to some degree, as pointed out in our discussion of track at Cistercian, from the school's half days during the last six weeks of senior year. But this handicap hasn't dampened the

enthusiasm for baseball and tennis.

Tom Hillary loved baseball passionately and the 6'6" shortstop from SMU couldn't bear to see Cistercian go without a baseball team. In 1987, he established the Hawk's first varsity team and, in 1993, the Hawks won the MISC title. Then he handed off the coaching duties to Mark Gray, who has served as head coach ever since.

The Hawks won SPC Division-II titles in 1997 and in 2000. The '97 team was led by three sophomores, Greg Carney '99, Justin Bodien '99, and Mick Brugge '99.

In 2000, pitchers Richard Gultinan '00 and Anthony Peron '01 made life difficult for opposing teams. Gultinan walked on at Yale and Peron played one year at West Point. It also included David West '00, brother Michael West '02, and freshmen Seth Henderson '03 and Matt Truitt '03.

In the summer of 2000, just months after Tom

Hillary's death, the baseball facilities were upgraded according to his wishes.

Perhaps the most powerful team in Cistercian history did not win a title at all; but, the '03 Hawks came very close to winning the whole enchilada (D-I and D-II were combined into one 17-team tournament that year) behind Henderson, Truitt, Brent O'Donnell '03, and Gary Darby '03.

With a lackluster regular season record, the Hawks were pitted against the North Zone's top seed, Casady. But Zach Heard '04 pitched a complete game and some big hits lifted the Hawks to a 9-5 win.

The Hawks easily dispatched Greenhill (for a season sweep of the Hornets) in the second game behind the pitching of Stephen Bailey '04, 13-1.

Then the Hawks came within two runs of the championship game, but succumbed to St. Mark's (the eventual tournament winner), 4-2.

Heard walked on at Texas, where he played for two seasons. Darby played for the Naval Academy.

H.T. Flanagan '07 went on to pitch relief for Washington University for four years.

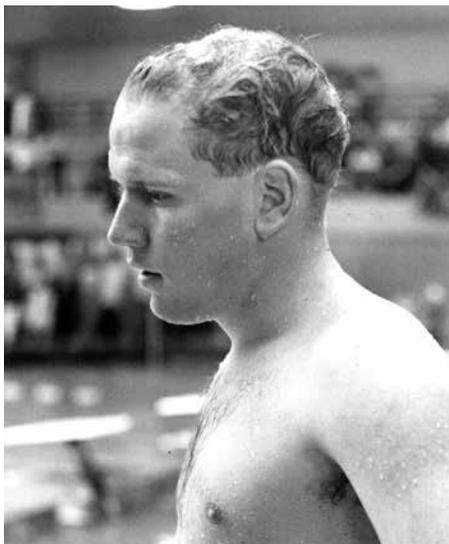


(Above) Jack Pritchett '93 prepares to lay down a bunt for the MISC-winning team, the last to be coached by Tom Hillary. (Below) Brent O'Donnell '03 attempts to drive in the runner from third.

Long after the excitement of high school football, basketball, soccer, baseball and track fades, we are left with those sports or activities that we can pursue for a lifetime. Participants in cross country, tennis and golf, often toil in relative anonymity. We won't disturb them except to cover a few highlights.

In the early days, cross country was viewed by some as a sadistic punishment for not playing football. But as the student body grew, talented runners were attracted to the sport. Its popularity at Cistercian received an unexpected boost in 1996 when former headmaster Fr. Bernard Marton began running marathons.

The cross country team has attracted talented coaches in recent



(l-r) Tennis player Will Beutenmuller '06, swimmer John Henrich '93, and cross-country runner Paul Nolan '94.

years, including David Monroe and University of Dallas runners, Barry McCain '02, Ryan Gorman, and Franz Klein.

In 2010, Isaac Johnston '11 ran his way into Cistercian cross-country lore by earning his third consecutive All-SPC finish, placing eighth out of a field of 156 with a time of 16:40.

Tennis may be viewed by some as a relatively relaxing way to participate in a spring sport. Some outstanding athletes have declined invitations to contribute to the baseball or track teams so that they can enjoy themselves on the court.

Participation has grown over the years and it received a healthy boost in 2002 when the tennis courts morphed into a full-fledged tennis complex (minus the clubhouse).

Will Beutenmuller '06 served as the number one singles player in 2005 and 2006; he lost only three matches in that span. He went on to play tennis at Princeton.

"I remember," Matt Roney '10 said before he graduated, "that *The Informer* published a story on the winter sports one year, and they left out swimming altogether." Roney's swimming career began in earnest his sophomore year and the same year Doug Moyses became Cistercian's new swim coach. Not surprisingly, that was the first year ever Cistercian made a splash at SPC, placing third.

"I want people to know that swimming is a sport at Cistercian," Moyses said upon introducing himself to Fr. Gregory Schweers, the resident swimming promoter.

At that first SPC meet his sophomore year, Roney blew away the competition, winning the 200-yard freestyle by two seconds and the 100-yard butterfly by three seconds. He completed his high school swimming career undefeated in individual events over three years. He holds the SPC records for both the 100-yard butterfly (51.91) and the 200-yard freestyle (1:41.60).

Roney was recruited by Cal-Berkeley, UT, Michigan, and Virginia Tech, but chose SMU which offered a set of academic scholarships in addition to an athletic scholarship.

"I'd like to go to the NCAA's," said Roney in 2010, "and Olympic trials in two years. They're both realistic goals but I will have to work really hard to accomplish them."

Moyses built enthusiasm for the sport, hooking the team on to Roney's rising star.

"Coach Moyses recruited more swimmers and helped rewrite virtually every record," said Fr. Gregory. "Only Nathan (Carlo) Porter's record in the 100-yard breast stroke remains."

Remarkably, after Roney's departure in 2010, the Hawks were able to place second at the 2012 SPC meet, with the help of an influx of talent and another elite talent in Jake Watters '13.

Everybody now knows that swimming is one of the school's winter sports.

"Swimming and golf are not mainstream sports," acknowledged Roney's classmate, David Klautt '10. "Most of our classmates just didn't know what was going on with us."

In high school, Klaudt competed on the prestigious Texas Jr. Golf Tour and in the American Jr. Golf Association tournaments.

As a junior, he won the junior club championship at Brookhaven Golf Club. As a senior, he won the men's club championship.

Klaudt received both an athletic and academic scholarship from Kansas State.

Klaudt has unapologetically set the goal for himself to play professionally.

From the hallowed ground of Notre Dame Stadium to the sofa-strewn sidelines of Robert Moses Field at Southwestern University, Cistercian athletes have competed on stages large and small.

"Playing a varsity sport in college is tough," said Chris Carlson '85, who earned a starting spot at outside linebacker for Navy in a game against Notre Dame his junior year. "But Cistercian prepared me for it."

Carlson's chance to move into the starting lineup came early in the fourth quarter of a game in which Navy trailed the Irish by a wide margin.

"Running on to the field was a bit of an out-of-body experience," he said. "I thought of all the games I had watched of Notre Dame on TV. It was pretty cool."

Carlson also went on to play against Syracuse and their fullback Daryl Johnston "who was a big challenge." He also played in two Army-Navy games.

Tom Lewis '73 played at a number of major-league venues in his days as a safety and special teams player for Rice.

"A fond memory was our play against Notre Dame in South Bend," he said. "While we lost by a touchdown, we were picked to lose by 50+ points."

As a punter his senior year, Lewis launched one 80

yards, a school record at the time.

On Feb. 1, 2012, Ikenna Nwafor '12 officially signed his letter of intent to play football at Stanford. At 6'5", 300 lbs., Nwafor was ranked as the 35th-best defensive tackle prospect in the nation by Scout.com. He also plans to be a doctor.

In the mid-seventies, brothers Buck Smith '71 and Jimmy Smith '72 swam for Ivy League rivals Yale and Harvard, respectively.

Both had been recruited by the likes of SMU, UT, and the Ivies.



Ranked as the 35th-best defensive tackle prospect in the country, Ikenna Nwafor '12 became the most highly recruited athlete in Cistercian history. He will play for Stanford, where he plans to study for a career in medicine.

At one meet, "the Harvard coach swam Jimmy against me in one of my specialty races," remembered Buck recently. "He put him in the lane next to me."

"Of course I kicked his butt," Buck laughed, "but he really messed with me. Before the race Jimmy was spitting water in my lane and splashing the water off the top of the starting blocks on me and into my lane. That sounds minor, but it can be very distracting."

Mark Talkington '79, a high school All-American soccer player (one of 33

nationally) his senior year, ranks as arguably the school's most highly recruited athlete ever.

"My parents separated my senior year and that created some financial issues," Talkington remembered. "Fr. Denis became my unofficial sports agent and negotiated full scholarships with two Ivy League schools that had accepted me, but offered me smaller financial packages than Stanford. That gave me freedom to choose a school without financial worries."

At the beginning of Talkington's second year at Stanford, he recognized one of the freshmen, Todd Sayer, who had moved to California after his freshman year at Cistercian. The two played at Stanford together for three years.

The pair helped Stanford slap Connecticut with a 3-0 loss. The Huskies would end up as national

champions that year.

John Michael Stewart '89 represented Tom Hillary well at his *alma mater*. Stewart won Kodak All-American honors at SMU and attempted to play professionally.

Division-I college athletes, 1970-2012

Alumnus	Year	Sport	College
Kevin Coyle	1970	Basketball	Rice
Buck Smith	1971	Swimming	Yale
James Smith	1972	Swimming	Harvard
Tom Lewis	1973	Football	Rice
Joe Nicholson	1974	Track	Notre Dame
Peter Smith	1974	Golf	Harvard
Todd Moore	1978	Football	SMU
Mark Talkington	1979	Soccer	Stanford
Greg O'Hagan	1984	Football	Texas
Chris Carlson	1985	Football	Navy
Mike Stanzel	1986	Football	Navy
Matt Walter	1986	Football	Princeton
John Michael Stewart	1989	Soccer/Football	SMU
Sean Phillips	1991	Soccer	Indiana
James Sivco	1991	Track	Villanova
Jeff Lockhart	1993	Track	Tulane
Artie Starrs	1994	Golf	Princeton
Bubba Futerfas	1995	Football	SMU
Nathan Porter	1995	Swimming	Fordham
Donovan Campbell	1997	Crew	Princeton
Michael Aird	1997	Football	Northwestern
Robert Patrizi	2000	Track	TCU
Jonathan Purcell	2000	Crew	Texas
Anthony Perone	2001	Baseball	Army
Seth Henderson	2003	Football	Texas
Michael Giordano	2003	Crew	Notre Dame
Jason Mitura	2003	Rowing	USC
Colin Leatherbury	2005	Track	Yale
Trey Mohr	2005	Track	Notre Dame
Will Beuttenmuller	2006	Tennis	
Sam Bowler	2006	Track	Duke
Matt Abola	2007	Football	Princeton
Chase Campbell	2007	Football	Princeton
David Klaudt	2010	Golf	Kansas State
Matt Roney	2010	Swimming	SMU
Ikenna Nwafor	2012	Football	Stanford

* This list includes athletes who either played or were recruited to play Division-I college sports. Please accept our apologies for any errors.

As far as putting his high school and college experience directly to work, it's difficult to avoid the name of Sean Phillips '91.

One of the top two or three goalkeepers coming out of Texas in '91, Phillips attracted the attention of soccer powerhouse Indiana University, where soccer ranks next to basketball in importance.

"Playing under the most successful college soccer coach of all time (six national championships, 16 final fours) in Jerry Yeagley," acknowledged Phillips, "left an indelible mark on me professionally and personally."

In February 2010, Phillips was named head soccer coach at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

He is Cistercian's first Division-I college coach.

Nathan Porter '95, an All-American in the 100 breast stroke senior year (i.e., a top-16 time nationally), was recruited by Texas A&M, the University of Minnesota, and others.

He chose Fordham, where he became Atlantic-10 champion in the 100-meter breaststroke and a part of the winning 200 and 400 medley relays. All three were Fordham records (since broken).

Porter continues to hold the Cistercian record for the 100-yard breaststroke. It is the only record Matt Roney has not eclipsed.

As a member of the 3rd Ranger Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Porter went on to serve two tours in Afghanistan and two in Iraq.

While Cistercian's sports programs always have and always will take a back seat to academics, it is nice to know that with some talent, hard work, and luck, our individuals and teams can, occasionally, achieve greatness.

Chapter 8

Outside the classroom

BY CHRISTINE MEDAILLE

A look at the senior pages from Cistercian's oldest yearbooks reveals long lists of accomplishments in academics and athletics, but on many pages there is little mention of participation in other activities. Photos in those early books show the Radio Club and the Camera Club (*Exodus* 1983 lists Fr. Henry as the sponsor of the Future Teachers Club), but these organizations disappeared as others replaced them.

Fr. Julius's Chess Club, however, has had quite a long life. In some years, the Chess Club engaged teams from area schools; in others, the club was strictly in-house. And, no surprise, students in Fr. Julius's own form were particularly enthusiastic about chess.

At times, new activities have been introduced, often as a result of student initiative. Some of these groups become permanent at Cistercian while others are short lived. Language Clubs — French, Spanish,

and German — once drew many students, but these organizations are now gone.

Active student musicians have participated in a variety of Music Clubs — one offered student composers and musicians a place to share new work with other drummers and guitar players; another centered on more traditional recital pieces. In this year's Music Activity, Fr. Augustine leads a loyal group of Upper School students to prepare works of Gregorian chant for the monthly Upper School Mass and all-school Masses at Christmas and the end of the year.

Debate Club too has come and gone and come again as a student activity. One of the earliest activities mentioned in the yearbook, debate seemed to disappear for a while. Two years ago, Jason Joseph, who teaches senior government, sponsored students in informal, yet regular, in-school debates. During the 2011-2012

school year, Fr. Joseph Van House taught a debate elective and sponsored a Debate Club that participated against area schools.

One of Cistercian's newest activities is Mock Trial. Remembering the energy and spirit of competition and cooperation as they put Odysseus on trial during freshman English, several sophomores wrote a proposal and asked Jackie Greenfield, veteran English teacher, to sponsor the group.

Similarly, computer-savvy juniors enlisted Greg Graham in fall 2011 to begin an activity called The Architects, the new face of Cistercian software development.

Through the years, many Cistercian students have been active in groups that merge academics with extra-curriculars. Participants in Math Club, under the enthusiastic sponsorship of Tom Hall, J. T. Sutcliffe, and Hal Willis, spent Saturdays in competition against a variety of Dallas area private and public schools. J. J. Pearce High School, the Eastfield campus of DCCCD, and St. Mark's (with its popular middle school competition) were yearly destinations for *mathletes* in the 80's and early 90's.

Richard Newcomb, joining the Cistercian faculty in 1995, energized all levels of Cistercian math activities. A long list of math competitions — McNabb

and Mandlebrot, AMC and AIME, TXML and Texas A & M — was followed by a much longer list of honored math students. And travel for contests is no longer limited to Dallas County, but rather extends to prestigious competitions on the campuses of Texas A & M and Rice University.

Assisted through the years by teachers Rebekah Hahn, Michael Humphries, David Andrews, Jeff Tinker '97, and Jon Gray, Newcomb has worked after school with Middle School students to prepare teams for MathCounts in both area and state contests.

Other Cistercian students who reveled in academic competition were naturals for quiz bowl style contests. *Exodus* 1983 shows a group of "Whiz Quiz" members gathered around new faculty member Sally Pruitt (now Sally Cook). Rodney Walter's team dominated the yearly History Quiz Bowl at the University of Dallas's TPSAR (Texas Private Schools Academic Rally) during the 1980's.

Cistercian Quiz Bowl as we know it today appeared in the early 1990's. Fr. Gregory's quiz bowlers began to meet twice weekly during activity periods and often after school or even during vacations. They took competition seriously and engaged in regular matches against other area quiz bowl powerhouses. In the early 90's, the Quiz Bowl team traveled around the state to compete, and the 1992 team participated in the group's first competition at Rice. Since that time, the

Quiz Bowl team has been in countless contests on the local, state, and national level. And the team has always been a force at these meets, at times fielding three different teams to showcase the expertise of senior members and to give younger members experience in displaying "grace under pressure."

As a Fourth Former, Gautam Dutta '90 achieved the dream of so many Middle School spelling bee contestants at Cistercian by winning his way to the Washington, D.C. National Finals. Dutta lasted well into the second day of competition. As an Upper



With a Middle School MathCounts program and the Upper School Math Club, Richard Newcomb shares his students' enthusiasm for solving math problems.

School student, he (along with sponsor Bob Haaser) helped build enthusiasm and participation among Fourth Formers for the National Geography Bee.

Two groups, however, have remained consistently vital on the Cistercian campus: Student Council and publications. The Student Council offers campus leaders and representatives opportunities to plan and carry out after-game parties, volleyball and dodgeball tournaments, and special events like homecoming and prom. In addition, this group (sponsored through the years by Fr. Peter, Greg Novinski, Peter Saliga, Fr. Paul, and now Michael Humphries) has had the responsibility for funding these projects. The Student Council has traditionally put its greatest energy and creativity into producing the Homecoming Dance. The Cistercian homecoming festivities have gained a solid reputation for clever themes carried out with top-notch (even over-the-top-notch) decorations.

The other mainstay of Cistercian's activities is publications. Membership on the staffs of *The Informer* and *Exodus* is mentioned on senior pages in the yearbooks of the 1970's. *The Informer* was founded in the spring of 1971 and ever since has provided students with the opportunity to write articles on school activities and athletics, topics of national interest, music and movies, and local fast food options. Students also handle editing and layout responsibilities. In the old days (before the 90's), this meant rubber glue pasting galleys of type and halftones onto layout boards and using tape for the border lines.

Today, students gain valuable experience with layout software. But all learned the magic of imagining stories, writing, editing, and combining the words with pictures to make a statement. Sponsors of the newspaper include Stephen Housewright, Thomas Pruitt, Jonathan Leach, Peter Saliga, and Gary Nied.

Exodus 1970 is the oldest yearbook on the shelf. The yearbook has always chronicled major events of the year. For its first thirty years, the yearbook was largely the product of quadpaks (four sheets of thin

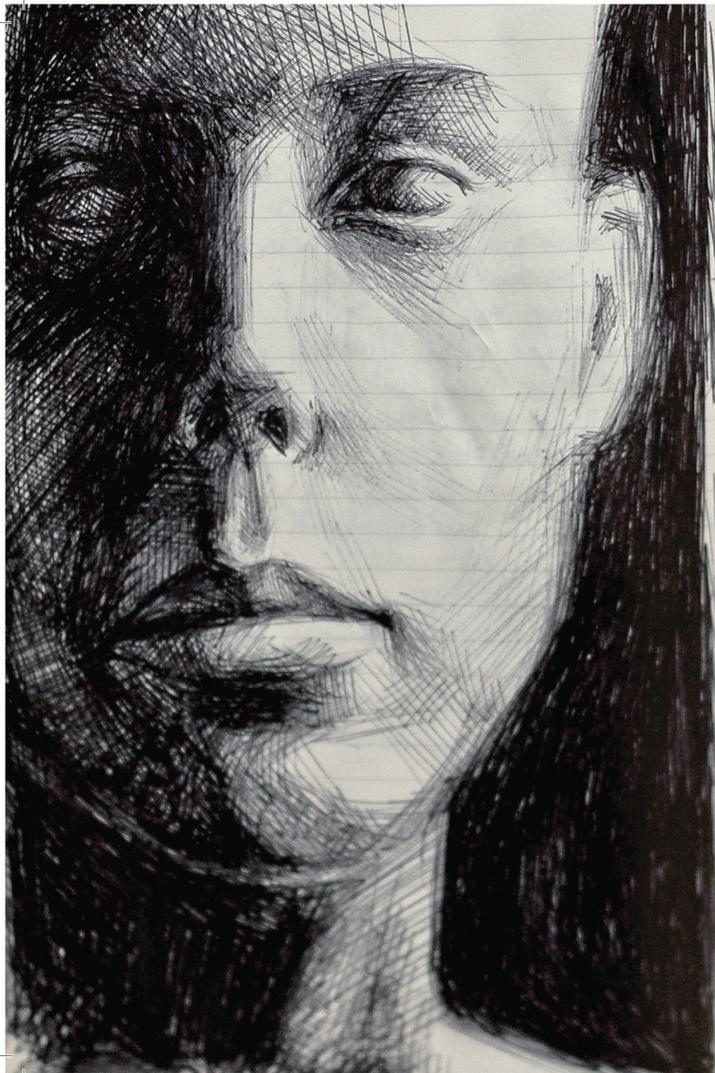
paper layered with carbon paper) and the Cistercian darkroom. The quadpaks required that instructions for font and point size be handwritten for each article and caption. Pictures were often furnished by the Camera Club, and they were developed, printed, and cropped on campus by members of the *Exodus* staff. Rodney Walter, Chris Bock, and Christine Medaille sponsored those pre-digital books. As of 2000 (with the sponsorship of Patrick Mehen, Anthony Perry, Cambria Reinsborough, and David Patrick '86), pre-publication *Exodus* has existed primarily in bits and pixels. And both *Exodus* and *The Informer* abandoned their home in the pub and moved to the Computer Lab.

Although *Reflections*, first published in 1982, may be the youngest of the school's three publications, it is the one

that has received the most honors — most recently garnering another Gold Crown Award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. *Reflections* was originally the school's literary magazine and showcased outstanding fiction, nonfiction, and poetry from writers in all eight forms. Chris Bock was the



The Class of '14 has asked Jackie Greenfield to sponsor Mock Trial, an extra-curricular based on their trial of Odysseus in freshman English. Greenfield also for many years conducted a mock trial in Form III. She also served as sponsor of Reflections and helped it achieve national recognition.



Effigy

John Paul Spence '12

I am the balding, beheaded statue
decaying on the top of that windswept bluff
surrounded by the blasted columns and fading temples
of an old Roman town stumbling toward the western sun.

I was sculpted by a common craftsman,
a memorial for some centurion whose hundred
could not keep him from the avenging angel
and from the fury of the looting Goth.

He left a hairline fracture in my neck,
a slight blemish, missed by his untrained eye,
which, preyed upon by wind and sky and water,
widened, broke open, and left me headless,
beneath the smirking heavens.

I was not meant for scholars' investigations
or for poets' unfriendly, prying eyes,
but Gibbon, Cole, and Tolkien came regardless
and read anew the blunders of a novice laborer.

Now I'm the symbol of a fallen empire,
or, perhaps, of an empire's rebirth—
these mighty scholars cannot decide which.
They only know that I am nothing so plain and simple
as what I am.

A page from Reflections '11 featuring the artwork of Matthew Lancaster '13 and the poetry of John Paul Spence '12. For the past six years or more, the magazine has achieved recognition from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.

sole sponsor of the magazine until 1993, when Jackie Greenfield joined her on this activity. Under Jackie Greenfield's leadership, *Reflections* was transformed into a literary/art magazine and included visual art and photography to both stand alone as artistic expressions and complement the literary works. Again, new technology enabled Cistercian's creative student editors and staff to produce increasingly sophisticated and polished magazines. The quality of the magazine remains excellent under the current sponsorship of Michael O'Brien '00, and campus writers and artists are honored to be included.

Community service activities were informal during the school's first years. Even up to 1990, organized

community service programs were modest. But 1993 saw some changes. That year teams of Upper School students prepared presentations for some of the Dallas area parochial schools. These STARS (Students Teaching against the Risks of Smoking) planned lessons, conducted classes, and led discussions among their young students.

That same year, Can-a-Can also made its debut. Collecting and later recycling aluminum cans from the lunchroom (yes, we did have soft drinks in the lunchroom in the old days) and the concession stands, Upper School students began an activity that would later become the Recycling Club and then the Environmental Club, groups sponsored by Betty Sitton and Jon Gray. In addition, student representatives elected by their forms now comprise the Facilities

Council. This group leads student efforts to respect and care for Cistercian's beautiful grounds and buildings.

Tim Parker '90 was the force behind the organization of an active and energetic Community Service Program at Cistercian. Shortly after he joined the Cistercian faculty in 1996, Parker took groups of students to San Antonio and Alpine, Texas, to repair homes for Habitat for Humanity. Jackie Greenfield also sponsored these journeys of service. Other organized projects soon followed, and the majority of Upper School students joined in the Thirty-Hour Famine and service days both on and off campus. Faculty sponsors Tim Parker, Fr. Paul, and J. P. Walsh have guided this program, but Community Service representatives elected by their classmates coordinate the projects.

These activities have included planning and hosting a dance and carnival twice each year for area adolescents with Down syndrome, tutoring children at local elementary schools in impoverished neighborhoods, preparing and serving meals at homeless shelters, volunteering at various resale stores benefitting charitable organizations, buying Christmas gifts for disadvantaged children, and collecting food for



Seniors from the Class of '96 clown around at a local hospital and made some patients smile.

local food pantries.

Quick to respond to world crises with fundraising efforts, Cistercian students raised thousands of dollars in recent years to aid earthquake victims in Haiti and tsunami victims in Indonesia; in addition, they sent food and letters to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Not mandatory, Cistercian's Community Service Program is truly one of volunteers, yet participation and enthusiasm set new records year after year.

Cistercian students have often participated in service trips abroad with groups from churches or other organizations, but school-connected trips are now drawing dedicated Upper School students and faculty members.

During the summer of 2004, Tom Lewis '73 and his wife, Cathy Schanzer, invited a rising Cistercian senior to serve with them at the Southern Eye Clinic of Serabu in Sierra Leone. Since then two other students have spent three weeks serving and praying with patients and other workers. New for summer 2012 is a trip to Honduras for ten Cistercian Upper School students and teachers Lisa Hernandez, Michael McGuire, Greg Graham, and Michael O'Brien. They will spend



The Classes of '90 and '91 perform in the Christmas concert.

ten days on a variety of construction projects to help parishes in the Diocese of Trujillo.

The oldest Cistercian directory in the archives (1965-1966) lists Fr. Aurel as music teacher to Forms I, II, III, and IV, and even to Pre-form. That directory also mentions Cistercian's Boys' Choir and instrumental music lessons, available during study halls. Fr. Aurel remained with the music classes (though now scheduled for only Forms I and II) until



In a scene from Pseudolus in 1976, performed in the gymnasium theater, are (l-r) Richard Glasheen '78, David Anderson, Mark Penk '77, and Mark McCormick '77.

Rita Pilgrim took over in the fall of 1983. Under her direction, Forms I and II presented lively Christmas concerts each December — first in the lunchroom and later in the theater — and contributed to equally energetic talent shows each spring.

Since 1991, Kelly Shea has taught music at Cistercian. A professional flutist, she continued the instrumental aspect of music using the recorder that was introduced by Fr. Aurel into the Form II music program and added some instrumental pieces to the traditional vocal presentations for the annual Christmas concert, a program that in recent years has gained solemnity from its new location in the Abbey Church.

The regular twice-weekly music classes also

changed locations with the completion of the Music Room in 2002. Each May, students in Forms III-VIII are invited to perform in the Spring Recital to share their talent and dedication with the rest of the Cistercian community.

In the early years, Cistercian students had a variety of different art teachers. Some, like Prof. Lyle Novinski, were on the faculty of the University of Dallas; others, like Chuck Mims and Juergen Strunck, were recent graduates of or graduate students at UD. One, Fr. Damian, was Cistercian's first headmaster.

Billy Hassell '74 was both a student and a teacher at Cistercian.

According to Hassell, the lack of continuity was a problem during the early years, but the variety among experienced teachers and turnover among younger ones also offered exposure to different perspectives, attitudes, and techniques. The art classroom itself was another problem since this windowless room underneath the gym had a low ceiling and no natural light. The fluorescent lights, according to Hassell, were a real challenge for painters.

Roberto Munguia's 1979 arrival on campus gave the Art Department the

stability and continuity it needed. The required four years of art for all Middle School students, in addition to four different Upper School electives each year, meant that the original art room was always busy and always crowded. But even with less than ideal facilities, Cistercian teachers taught and inspired students to both appreciate and create visual art. The current Art Building, opened in 1998, solved many of the problems with light and space that plagued the old art room. Places — and power — for heating wax made the popular encaustic electives possible, and the kiln opened the field of ceramics to both Middle and Upper School students.

Photography, too, has been important to Cistercian

from the school's beginning. And another headmaster, this time Fr. Bernard, also taught Fine Arts electives, this time photography and video. Cistercian's Middle School building housed a darkroom until 2010, when all photography electives, under the direction of Jim Reisch, went completely digital and relocated to the Video Lab, which was already home to the video electives.

Upper School students have also been involved in the Art Club, with its yearly lock-ins and participation in the ISAS Arts Festival. The April event, hosted by various ISAS member schools in and out of the Dallas area, includes presentations, exhibits, and workshops for artists, photographers, and musicians. In addition, many students have taken advantage of opportunities to attend music performances as part of Fr. Gregory's popular opera elective or as members of the Junior Patrons' Guild, sponsored recently at Cistercian by Janet Bucher-Long and Peter Saliga.

Each May, the lobbies of the main building and the library display senior projects in visual art and photography, providing a chance for all to enjoy the artistic talents of Cistercian students. In the last few years, many senior projects have centered on music. Cistercian's theater has been the scene of a variety of public performances each May. Some projects in recent years have showcased piano and string selections, original compositions, and even a program that included sophisticated research on music history matched with an equally sophisticated piano performance.

Drama has always been popular at Cistercian. In the early years, serious plays seemed to dominate, perhaps to offset the performance space in the school's lunchroom. *Exodus* 1971 includes photos of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*,

directed by Rebecca Ramsey Walker, who returned to direct in the 1980's.

Cistercian actors also presented *A Man for All Seasons*, *Incident at Vichy*, and *The Mousetrap* in the 1970's. English teacher George Parks served as director of some of these works. When Jonathan Leach joined the English Department in the late 1980's, he also became Cistercian's resident director.

The plays — for Middle and Upper Schools in those years — took advantage of Cistercian's new space in the Science Building. Lively comedies (like *The Italian Straw Hat*) and farces (like *Scapino* and *The Government Inspector*) with elaborate sets and costumes fit the new space perfectly.

But serious works were not ignored. When Leach returned to direct in 2007, he adapted and directed some of Laurence Houseman's vignettes on St. Francis of Assisi. The spare sets and understated costumes let the actors shine. For the 2012 spring drama, David Patrick '86 directed a new group of actors in an energetic reprise of *Scapino*.

The casts of the early drama productions were all-Cistercian. Upper School students took the women's roles with creativity and costumes. In the late 1990's, however, girls from Ursuline were invited to audition and play both major and minor parts in Cistercian plays. And Cistercian students took advantage of the opportunities to perform in several plays each year by accepting parts in the Ursuline dramas and musicals.

Inspired by their increased theatrical experience, several seniors in the Class of 2004 presented an evening of one-act plays as their senior project. These senior one-acts now have a permanent place on the Cistercian arts calendar.

The drama space in the Science Building was completely remodeled



Braveart, which began in 1996 as a one-day arts festival, has grown into a Cistercian tradition that features workshops that emphasize "doing" art and a coffeehouse that celebrates enjoying art in its many forms.



in 2001. Permanent seats — both on the main floor and in the balcony — made viewing more enjoyable. The enlarged backstage area, catwalk, and light board gave valuable experience to the off-stage participants in Cistercian drama. And the Juliet balcony and trap offered more staging options.

Perhaps no other Cistercian arts activity has surpassed *Braveart* for creativity and enthusiasm among Upper School students. Thomas Pruitt and Roberto Munguia were the forces that brought Cistercian's February arts festival from idea to actuality. Born in 1996, *Braveart* did not get its name until the following year. The 1996 version was a one-day (a Saturday, in fact) mostly outdoor festival that included workshops, poetry readings, and the school's first Coffee House — located on the stage of the gym, with the whole Upper School and guests seated on the floor behind the stage curtains. In following years, Pruitt enlisted enthusiastic support from faculty and parent volunteers to expand the scope of *Braveart*.

The list of scheduled events has varied through the years to include museum visits (with introductions from art experts at times), movie viewings followed by discussions (*Searching for Bobby Fischer*, the first, and *The King's Speech*, the most recent), and talks by Cistercian alumni who were working in the arts (like Rob Greenfield '92, David Patrick '86, and Mike Miga '95).

Several important *Braveart* components have remained constant: a day filled with dozens of choices

of art workshops, all recorded by a workshop called Guerilla Video; an art exhibit featuring Upper School visual arts and a contest judged by a local professional artist; and, the most important Upper School event of the spring, Coffee House.

Featuring Upper School performers, along with friends from other schools and faculty and staff members, Coffee House offers a venue for talented vocalists, musicians, poets, and comedians. In addition, it allows members of the audience to observe and appreciate the considerable talents of classmates and friends. At the close of each *Braveart*, students, faculty members, and parents begin plans for the following year's events.

In the fall of 2011, Peter Saliga took over the organization of *Braveart*. In addition, he became the school's first Fine Arts Coordinator to help

teachers more effectively incorporate a greater exposure to the production of and appreciation for the arts into the school's curriculum.

Cistercian's solid all-honors core curriculum allows little room for variety. Electives, modern language, and senior science are the only choices for students. For that reason, the selection of activities, organized community service, and fine arts options is a particularly important way to individualize an Upper School experience and make it one's own.



Kyle Welch '07 dances with a guest at the Down Syndrome Guild Dance in November 2006. Co-sponsored by Hockaday and Ursuline, the bi-annual event is one of the most popular community service/social events each semester.

Chapter 9

Social evolution

“In your first couple of years in Upper School,” Robbie Earle ’05 reflected, “you feel some pressure to be cool. You want to bring a girl to the Homecoming Dance who other people think is pretty. It should be someone who you like too; but, as a freshman or sophomore, the probabilities of that are not in your favor.”

“I spent the Freshmen Mixer avoiding people,” remembered Weston McBride ’05, who served as student government president his senior year. “I left with no phone numbers or IM addresses. Freshman year, I was social within the class but not with girls. I stayed away from them.”

“Sophomore year I began meeting people and doing things with coed groups. I still wasn’t quite out of my socially inept days,” he said, “but I was on my way.”

“I met a lot of new people sophomore year at school-sponsored social events and other places,” agreed Jacob Arias ’04. “It was a rough year in many ways, but it was also the year of branching out to other schools (not just Ursuline and Hockaday), like Macarthur, Irving, Coppell, Bishop Lynch, and Highland Park.

“It was sort of a trial run of what would come later. I was able to meet guys and girls from different backgrounds and see how I was able to interact with them. Learning the do’s and the don’ts of those interactions helped reduce my ‘social awkwardness.’”

“Life at Cistercian,” noted Tom Stimson ’78, “can be intimidating, especially for those of more modest means. Here we are rubbing elbows with the sons of people so rich they don’t have to be famous. We go on class outings to country estates or ranches and we attend birthday parties that have their own waiters.



Chemistry teacher and basketball coach Bob Patrizi (center with hat) holds a sign for a cafe in honor of his Italian heritage (The Godfather was big that year). With the paint still drying, homecoming was held in the gym for the first time.

“But after a few years you find that while opportunity may be different from one boy to the next, in life (and love) we are all on a level playing field. That is one of the greatest gifts of the Cistercian experience; the knowledge that the only opportunities that count are yours and all that matters is what you do with them.”

“What I like about Cistercian,” McBride commented, “is that there are all these incredibly smart kids who can choose their lifestyle. You can be smart, social, athletic, whatever you want. You don’t get stuck in a clique or social hierarchy.”

By senior year, Robbie Earle had grown comfortable in his skin and with his classmates. He had joined a band and been named a captain of the football team.

“I was a lot less self-conscious as senior,” Earle acknowledged. “My classmates knew who I was so I could just be myself. I could look forward to Homecoming and having a great time with my date and my classmates and enjoying the music and activities.”

“Would you boys like to paint some graffiti?” asked a couple of moms who rushed up to Scott Novak ’05 and a few of his classmates during one of the many hectic afternoons that Cistercian boys spent decorating the gym for Homecoming 2004. That year’s theme: The Eighties.

“Heck yea,” answered Novak, as if nothing could be more obvious. The graffiti would give an authentic feel to the 15-foot Berlin Wall that had been erected as a reminder of the end of the decade.

“All of the students were motivated to make our Homecoming special,” said Earle. “If anyone had a good idea, they could approach Weston and put it into action.”

“We started working on Homecoming during the summer through a series of meetings with the senior class officers, Fr. Paul, Mrs. [Barbara] Moroney, and Mrs. [Brenda] Welch,” recalled McBride.

“It was all driven by the boys,” insisted Mrs. Moroney. “I helped with organization and Brenda was

a fabulous resource person. But the creative aspect was all in the boys' hands."

"We had a lot of faith in our classmates," McBride added. "It could have been risky to let them run with a theme, but we were very pleased with what they produced."

"None of this was mandatory," he emphasized, "they came of their own free will. And we couldn't have done it without them."

"Decorating for Homecoming that year was one of the neatest experiences I have seen at Cistercian," said Bev Dale. "To watch all those boys take ownership of decorating the gym was awesome. I enjoyed seeing these really bright boys get together and be so creative, solve problems, talk through ideas and figure out how to get it done."

"It was a lesson in teamwork," added Mrs. Moroney. "With their studies, sports, and some of them applying early decision to college, it can be tough. But they stepped up to the plate and got it done."

Over the years, Cistercian parties have developed an impressive reputation in the single-sex, private school community.

"It's one place where Cistercian can shine," suggested Mrs. Moroney. "The parties are entertaining because there is so much to do."

Each year's Homecoming requires new decorations and props (e.g., the Berlin Wall), the games (e.g., the dance machine, televisions with movies playing), and casino tables.

Then there's a virtual warehouse of party paraphernalia that has been accumulated over the years and stored in the gym. This party warehouse includes boxes and boxes of decorations used for the Freshman Mixer, Homecoming, and other events. There is an endless string of lights, and even a disco dance floor that lights up, inspired by Saturday Night Fever (built in the fall of 1999 by Greg Novinski '82 and his brother David Novinski '90 along with members of the Class of '00).

"All the elements create a very welcoming environment," Mrs. Moroney said. "The boys don't have to rely exclusively on conversation when they bring a girl they don't know very well. It's good for the girls too. Girls have their own problems with awkwardness. Let's remember that none of these kids is very socially adept at this age."

Seniors and their dates scattered into the darkness of an October night in 1990. They weren't coming back. The numbers leaving this Homecoming party could not be ignored. Fr. Peter Verhalen '73, student government sponsor, made his way down to the lower parking lot and pleaded with them to stay.

He was concerned how the younger boys would react to upperclassmen leaving the party.

But Fr. Peter knew that the onus for the exodus did not lie on the students alone. Cistercian parties failed to provide much entertainment. Fr. Peter could hardly blame the students for wanting to leave.

Part of this party-challenged culture was promoted by the Hungarian monks who had set a social course for Cistercian that reflected their Old World educational system. In

Hungary, schools played an exclusively academic role; social and athletic activities took place outside of school. By importing this model to Texas, the monks had left Cistercian students to their own devices. Fr. Peter knew that could be dangerous.

"This Old World philosophy has merit," admitted Fr. Peter. "We don't want to get to the point that we're taking over the parents' role."

"On the other hand," he said, "my concern at the end of the eighties was that this philosophy was abandoning our students to negative societal influences. I wanted the school to create parties that were so much fun that the boys wouldn't want to leave. I wanted us to provide a support group, a context in which the kids



Chris McGehee '78 and date at the 1977 homecoming party.

would be more likely to make the right decisions.”

Fr. Peter enlisted the help of parents and several young, energetic faculty members in the effort to throw better parties.

“Greg Novinski and Jonathan Leach helped give the party planning direction,” Fr. Peter remembered. “It was in the early nineties that Greg suggested dropping the ceiling in the gym to give the space a more intimate atmosphere.”

Ping pong and pool tables were rented. The senior photo was scheduled for 11:30 pm. Such adjustments began to make a difference. Boys and their dates

schools described some Cistercian students as “socially awkward.” A few parents were surprised and offended. But the words resonated with many who had been affiliated with the school for a long period of time.

“Cistercian doesn’t have a true sister school, and it shows,” the magazine opined. “Even many seniors tend to be socially awkward — though ‘many’ is a relative term because an entire senior class will comprise fewer than 40 boys.”

The socially awkward stereotype dates back to the seventies when Cistercian students felt ostracized by the school’s location, its newness, its size, and even its unusual name.

Over the years, Cistercian students felt, and sometimes still do feel, like interlopers at Hockaday and Ursuline dances where they are outnumbered by boys from St. Mark’s and Jesuit.

Compared to their counterparts at these schools, Cistercian students enjoy fewer built-in relationships with the girls. Not only are there fewer institutionally co-ed events (e.g., St. Mark’s Spirit Night), many Cistercian students don’t even reside near North Dallas. As a result, they don’t have the opportunity to meet Hockaday

and Ursuline girls at grade school or church.

Finally, Cistercian students are generally more economically diverse, which can sometimes create a sense of awkwardness.

And through the seventies and most of the eighties, Cistercian students received little help from their school.

“You spend eight years separated from girls,” said Gary Lucido ’73, “and then you’re supposed to feel comfortable around them? Heck, if it weren’t for watching my daughters grow up I still wouldn’t know how girls think. And my wife is still a mystery.”

Lucido pointed out another handicap.

“How are a bunch of Hungarian immigrants supposed to teach [American] kids about assimilating into society?” asked Lucido.

While the Hungarians were leaving the



Chris Crawley '83 and his date enjoying themselves at the 1982 homecoming.

started to find reasons to stick around.

The Cistercian social scene took another step forward in the late eighties when after-game parties were introduced.

“Parents stepped in to organize them,” Novinski said. “Initially they were not hugely attended. It was mostly upperclassmen. Parents chaperoned, but the school was not officially involved.”

“A few incidents in 1993 and 1994 forced us to draw up some official guidelines on how these events should be chaperoned and supervised. From that point forward, these parties became official functions of the school at which school rules applied and administrators or faculty of the school were present.”

In November 2002, *D Magazine*’s review of private

social development of the boys to their parents, communication between students and parents in the seventies and early eighties was hindered by the “generation gap.” The boys often were left to revel or to unravel “doing their own thing.”

“Cistercian helped make me self-confident in my personal values and priorities,” said Christopher Kribs Zaleta ’85, “but provided few opportunities for the kind of social development crucial in adolescence.”

Nevertheless, Cistercian students survived. And some believe that Cistercian’s quirks made up for a few of its shortcomings.

“My classmates at Cistercian lived all over the Metroplex,” said Clark Hicks ’90, “which meant I had to socialize with their friends when I went to their houses. When we had parties on the weekends in the late eighties there were kids from all different schools at our parties, both public and private. That made it a lot easier to meet people at college.”

“I am going to be your spiritual father,” Fr. Paul told his class of First Formers in the fall of 1997. “And you will be spiritual brothers.” As form master to

the Class of 2005, Fr. Paul never wavered from this message. Over the years, a few students from the class left Cistercian. No matter what the reason, Fr. Paul always invited them back for special occasions.

“I made a commitment that I’d be here for them, whether they stayed at Cistercian or not. Inviting former classmates back regularly also sends a message to the remaining members of the class — your acceptance by me is unconditional. After all, a father can’t disown a son because he makes bad grades.”

Fr. Peter selects form masters based on their ability to lead spiritually, academically, and socially. During the course of weekly form master periods over a class’ eight years at Cistercian, there are countless opportunities for form masters to discuss with the boys issues ranging from morality to dress codes.

Every form master seeks to instill a sense of acceptance among the classmates. The Form IV confirmation retreat has sometimes served as an important occasion for fostering this acceptance. Near

The 1991 homecoming dance with Jeff Lockhart ’93 in the center of the dance/gym floor, not a decoration in sight.



the end of the retreat, students are sometimes asked to make statements about the role that their faith has played in their lives.

“The boys opened up with their most personal struggles,” remembered Fr. Paul of the Form IV retreat for the Class of ’05. “Their willingness to talk honestly about themselves at the confirmation retreat — especially at a vulnerable stage like age 13 or 14 — went a long way in reinforcing their commitment to accept one another.”

While Cistercian form masters enjoy a great deal of freedom in the way they lead, many of their messages touch on class unity, virtues, and postponing exposure to temptations.



Things have evolved a lot since the seventies when, as Tom Stimson '78 pointed out, “we had maybe six cheerleaders and another four to five female prospects in the audience.” Above, Steve Rasch '80, Mark Roppolo '88, and Joseph Shea '78 enjoy how things have changed at Homecoming games.

“We are taking the boys through a very dangerous period,” Fr. Peter said. “Our job is to instill values, to help them realize what it means to make it to manhood. We want to save them from all the false advertising, to help them postpone some of the difficult choices, and to treat their classmates and girls with respect.”

The form master system, along with a steady diet of theology courses, seems to make a difference.

Fr. Roch Kereszty and Fr. Paul handle the theology classes during high school and they frequently address social issues.

“In my experience, morals are taught mostly by example,” suggested Niculin Herz '06, when he was asked by Jackie Greenfield in junior English how Cistercian builds boys' characters. “Young people assimilate the values of those they respect and love. It is no different with the teachers and coaches here at Cistercian. Our teachers are firm, committed, upstanding men and women who strive to uphold the morals the school hopes to instill in its students, and, by their example, teach the students the strength of those morals.”

Mrs. Greenfield, like many Cistercian teachers, tries to bring those lessons to life in her classes. She calls her junior English class, “The Imperative of Courage in an Incongruent World.”

“A good piece of writing changes you, just like any other creative work,” Patrick Romeo '06 told Mrs. Greenfield. “We are at a sensitive point in life when we're looking for influences to help define ourselves. Consciously or subconsciously, we are building our personas, our code of ethics, our philosophy of life.”

“Cistercian students,” he added, “are — sometimes unwillingly and unknowingly — imbued with virtue during their years at Cistercian.”

“I learned a lot about accepting other people,” Josh Campbell '02 said, “from Fr. Roch and Fr. Paul in theology classes. Vijay Pattisapu '02 would frequently ask very pointed questions in those classes.

The priests would always take the time, either in class or outside of class, to answer his questions and to present their point of view in a loving, kind way. They demonstrated a lot of understanding of his Hindu faith while they remained firm in their beliefs.”

“That really served as a model for me,” he added. “And it helped me a lot when I arrived at Princeton and discovered my roommate was a Hindu.”

“A lot of staying away from bad things comes from your upbringing,” Campbell said.

“That's what makes the role as director of admissions so important,” emphasized Fr. Peter. “We have to have families who are on board with our

program. It's a partnership."

Campbell served as a role model himself while at Cistercian. In addition to being a top student and star athlete, he chose not to drink.

"I didn't preach about it but I tried to demonstrate that you can have plenty of fun without drinking," he said. The example of smart, athletic, sociable guys like Campbell and classmates like Wheeler Sparks '02 (who dry-pledged Fiji at Washington & Lee), showed others it is possible to fight the peer pressure to drink.

Cars carrying nearly 300 freshman coeds to Cistercian this late August evening had traffic backed



The Batmobile set the tone for the Super Hero Homecoming of 2009. The builders were (front row, l-r): Kyle Moroney '12, Luke Tomaso '12, and David Novinski '12; (back row, l-r): Will Squiers '12, dad Jay Squiers, and dad, alumnus, and head of Upper School, Greg Novinski '82.

up on State Highway 114. As vehicles crept into view of the Middle School, chattering girls inside began pointing at the Hawaiian decorations and boys assembled at the foot of the stairs. Cistercian dads were opening car doors followed by a series boys, each taking the arm of the next girl setting foot at Cistercian. The boys escorted the girls up the stairs past the colored lights, the Tiki torches, and the cardboard sail boat to a registration table set up to record the name of the girl and their school.

Inside the lunchroom was transformed. The ceiling was covered by beach towels and the stark white columns were wrapped in Christmas lights and

topped with green paper palm leaves. Beach balls hung everywhere. Casino tables were manned by dads on the patio outside the lunchroom.

The boys' bathroom was converted into the ladies' room for the night and featured lots of free make-up and beauty accessories. Urinals were draped with grass skirts and topped with Tiki masks.

With such extravagant decorations and creative flourishes, it's no wonder that the Freshman Mixer — first instituted by parents in the early eighties — has developed a wonderful reputation despite a girl-to-boy ratio of over six to one (nearly 300 girls to 46 boys this year).

In several respects, the Mixer makes an appropriate way to introduce freshman girls to the Cistercian social scene, capturing in one event both the good and the bad.

They discover that Cistercian boys are bright, polite, witty, and attentive. Their parties are fun and entertaining. And it's a warm, close-knit community.

On the other hand, they find there are only so many Cistercian boys to go around (not all of whom are anxious for female companionship as this point in their lives) and only a few formal social occasions during which to meet them. It can be daunting for many of the girls, initially handing the advantage to the boldest among them, a few of whom may have designs on an invitation to the Homecoming dance.

For those Cistercian boys who had been wondering how they were going to find a Homecoming date, these advances may be welcomed. Later, however, they occasionally find that the girls were more interested in attending the dance than in accompanying them.

The Freshman Mixer also paints for the boys an unrealistic image of the social road ahead. Never again will they enjoy such fantastic odds in which girls willingly accept any invitation to dance. It's no wonder that at the Ursuline and Hockaday dances, where the ratio of girls to boys is more equal, Cistercian boys do not turn out in large numbers.

"The Freshman Mixer was a great party,"



Five hours to go before 2009 Homecoming. Pausing for a the photo are (knelling, l-r): Tommy Alcalá, Joel Fontenot '10, Bobby Prengle '10; (standing, l-r): David Graham, David Oliver, Michael Burns '81, and Andrea Clay.

said Susan Smith, who served as a class mom for Hockaday's freshman class in 2004. "But I wish they would split it up and hold several different parties to improve the ratio of girls to boys."

The monks won't have it though, believing that the schedule of social events remains sufficiently crowded as it is. And they have a point.

On the heels of the Freshman Mixer comes a series of after-game parties. Then there's the Upper School volleyball tournament (a weekend event in which girls are welcome), Homecoming, more after-game parties, and then the Down Syndrome Guild Dance. And that takes us through just the first weekend in November.

"My daughter Cheney appreciated the independent mindset of the Cistercian boys," said Susan Friedman,

mother of Bayard Friedman '03 and Kerr Friedman '07. "They don't have a herd mentality. She senses a little more maturity and respect for one another."

"We may not have been as wild and crazy as some guys," McBride admitted, "but we still had fun and we knew the limits of what is acceptable and what isn't."

"They're shyer in social situations," said a Hockaday junior who asked not to be identified. "But they are a lot more courteous."

"The Hockaday girls who date the Cistercian boys are not the cheerleader type," she added. "They are girls who don't care about the whole popularity scene and social structure. They just do their own thing."

In size alone, the Cistercian social landscape varies greatly from single-sex counterparts like St. Mark's, Jesuit, Hockaday, and Ursuline. While Cistercian can stage its Homecoming on campus, Jesuit's size forces

such all-school events into large, impersonal facilities. The numbers and venue change the complexion of the events and complicate their supervision.

Cistercian parties remain fairly intimate; non-Cistercian boys are prohibited.

“Our parties promote an insular feeling,” suggested Peter Saliga, who has served as the student government sponsor and the form master of the Class of ’11.

“College fraternities are insular also. It’s a communal life that forms who they are — a tight-knit group. It seems exclusive because it is.”

“By developing a tight community, you help ward off trouble.” And, Saliga added, “Insulation creates warmth.”

Within the community, few signs of social ineptitude arise. But like a fish out of water, Cistercian boys may flounder in larger social scenes (e.g., Ursuline and Hockaday dances).

“The insulation might be a source of some awkwardness,” Saliga admitted.

“I’d say that as a Cistercian student, my social awkwardness rated at best a 3 (on a scale of one to 10),” said Austin Murrey ’01.

“I definitely did not like the parties and crowds that so often came with high school gatherings. But I don’t think that it negatively impacted my social life in college at all. I had a fairly large group of close friends and became president of my (admittedly small) fraternity my sophomore year in college.

“Cistercian prepared me best,” Murrey remarked, “by allowing me to be comfortable with myself, so I didn’t feel pressured to be someone I wasn’t at college just so I would ‘fit in.’”

“Cistercian has given me too much confidence to feel socially awkward these days,” said Michael Keljo ’01. “I am confident about who I am and where I come from, what I value and what I don’t. I’ve seen a lot of people struggle with who they are in college, but have found that for me personally, Cistercian has given me an enormous sense of self.”

Naturally, the social patterns vary widely from class to class, just as the socially awkward quotient varies from individual to individual.

“In Donovan’s (Class of ’97) and Caleb’s (Class of ’00) groups, no one girl’s school dominated,” said Polly Campbell, who has observed the Cistercian social scene through the lives of her five sons. “But in Josh’s class (’02), seven of the boys dated girls from Highland Park

High School. Jordan’s class (’04) primarily socialized with Hockaday girls. Chase’s class (’07) was a mix.”

“Sometimes they socialized in groups without really pairing up as girlfriend and boyfriend, sometimes they paired up within the groups, and sometimes there was no pattern at all,” she said.

“It’s amazing,” she emphasized, “how a strong group could direct the social movement of the entire class.”

His ideas for a Homecoming costume — arguably the toughest sartorial decision a Cistercian upperclassman makes each year — centered first on a cartoon character, then gravitated toward something more iconic. In every incarnation, Robbie Earle clearly intended to trumpet himself and his date. That year’s Homecoming, his last as a Cistercian student, held special significance; the costume needed to reflect the import of the occasion.

“We decided yellow would be the most striking color,” Earle recalled, reconstructing his thought process. The clincher came when girlfriend Mandy Stafford, at the time a sophomore at Martin High School in Arlington, searched the Internet for “eighties cartoon characters.” Why hadn’t they thought of this before? The couple would go as the king and queen of eighties video gaming, Pac-Man and Mrs. Pac-Man (yes, a cartoon spin-off was created from the video game).

While Stafford’s mom measured and sewed, Earle made the requisite trips to the material store. Executing all the details (including a mouth for Pac-Man that could munch like that of the video game character) took time. In fact, Mrs. Stafford needed nearly 12 hours to complete each one; the finishing touches were added the evening of Homecoming as Earle’s classmates enjoyed their Homecoming dinner.

Arriving late, Pac-Man and Mrs. Pac-Man entered Homecoming 2004 through the central doors of the west (old) gym. Rather than passing the weight room, locker rooms, and coaches’ offices, they found themselves traveling through the tunnel from Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade.

Upstairs in the lobby between the two gyms, Fr. Gregory Schweers, dressed as an East German border guard, stamped tickets alongside tables covered with refreshments.

As Pac-Man and Mrs. Pac-Man entered the gym, ET hung above them riding his bicycle. The Berlin Wall, the dropped ceiling, and the black wall coverings removed any hint of the gym's familiar confines. On the far side of the Berlin Wall, partygoers could enjoy a variety of video games (including a version of Dance Dance Revolution), play black jack at the casino tables, recline on bean bags in the "Eighties Lounge" while watching eighties movies (e.g., Ferris Bueller's Day Off), or pose for a formal picture in the photo booth.

On the near side, the lighted dance floor remained jammed all night with students dressed as likenesses from the eighties, like Mr. T, Mario, the Blues Brothers, the Wild and Crazy Guys from Saturday Night Live, Blondie, and Cindy Lauper.

"I couldn't even imagine," raved Scott Novak, who was dressed as one of the Ghostbusters. "It was insane,

The Berlin Wall theme of the 2004 Homecoming brought a lots of costumes from the eighties.

much more than I expected. My date had never been to a Cistercian Homecoming party. She couldn't believe it."

But of all the costumes, Pac-Man and Mrs. Pac-Man took the cake.

"People we didn't even know kept coming up to us," said Earle. "A lot of people took our picture."

"Lots of people would charge Robbie," Stafford said. "They'd open up the mouth on his costume and make him chomp on them. Everybody thought the costumes were awesome."

Eight months after first becoming acquainted with the Cistercian community, Stafford had begun to feel like one of the family.

Earle, like any other teen, had understood the importance of this acceptance. In fact, her acceptance had seemed almost more important to him.

"My classmates embraced her," Earle said. "It was like they were saying, 'Hey Robbie, any friend of yours is automatically a friend of ours.'"



Today's Cistercian students don't seem to care whether they're labeled socially awkward. It certainly does not offend them. They acknowledge they have had their awkward moments and recognize some such moments may lie in their future. They understand social awkwardness can be chalked up to growing up.

They appreciate Cistercian's social scene, one that appears to have improved a little every year since the early nineties, tweaked by caring administrators, enthusiastic parents, and bright young men. Everyone appears happy with the results.

Attendance at the Homecoming dance has grown to include nearly 100 percent of the students in the Upper School. Freshmen began attending in large numbers in the mid-nineties. A special freshman Homecoming dinner was instituted at a parent's home to give them a chance to learn about eating a formal meal in a social setting. Two Cistercian buses pick up the freshman couples after the dinner and deliver them to the party, eliminating a traffic snarl at school.

"With the great decorations and all the effort our students put into it, the Cistercian Homecoming dance has become flat out the best in the Metroplex," Saliga stated definitively.

After-game parties also have improved. Members of the Student Government now visit and select the homes for the parties (contingent upon the approval of the faculty sponsor). The students, however, wisely relinquished the responsibility of providing the food several years ago; the parents do a much better job of that.

Since the mid-nineties, those students leaving the

parties have not been readmitted.

"That rule stopped anybody from retrieving an illicit substance or going out to their car and doing something they shouldn't," explained McBride. "I bet it still does."

"Almost all of our parties were well chaperoned, pretty docile and safe," he acknowledged. "We didn't see it as a negative at all. All of our friends were there and we had a great time without the things that go on at other parties."

While in the eighties, the "cool" group may have left early, 21st-century Cistercian students stay, fostering class harmony and harmony between classes. The harmony extends even beyond that.

"These parties create the kind of atmosphere in which guys are willing to make small talk with teachers," Novinski remarked. "It's a real positive phenomenon because our role is to form the whole person, academically, morally, athletically, and socially. At a party 15-20 years ago, the boys would have run from a teacher."

"Another very nice aspect of our parties was that girls' parents trust us and are comfortable letting their daughters attend Cistercian parties,"

McBride said.

More and more girls are finding that the Cistercian community presents a viable social option, even if they aren't dating a particular Cistercian boy. Many girls come to the games and parties to enjoy the warm, low-pressure atmosphere.

"A home football game at Cistercian today brings hundreds of young ladies in what can only be described as a teeming throng," marveled Tom Stimson '78, who visited recently.



Fr. Gregory Schweers has become a Homecoming attraction by taking each year's theme in surprising and entertaining directions. Above, Professor Plum dressed for the board game theme of 2008.

Things have evolved a lot since the seventies when, as Stimson pointed out, “we had maybe six cheerleaders and another four to five female prospects in the audience (okay, they were someone’s sisters or cousins but fair game under the circumstances).

“Today there are more cheerleaders on the field than we had football players in 1978,” he added.

Things also evolved a lot for members of the Class of 2005 during their four years in Upper School, as it does for each class.

“By your junior and senior year, the whole social experience starts to make more sense,” Earle pointed out.

“Our Homecoming was great,” he said. “My date really liked me, unlike freshman year.”

“At larger schools,” said Earle’s Homecoming date Stafford, “everyone learns how not to appear socially awkward.

“The Cistercian boys have significantly more genuine personalities,” she suggested. “Once you get to know them, you know who they really are.

“I love that about them.”

Chapter 10

Unlikely Texans

“Good Lord,” shivered Fr. Benedict Monostori as he lifted his clothes onto the bank and climbed naked from a five-foot-deep irrigation canal. He, along with 19 Cistercian novices and another Cistercian monk, had only minutes before escaped across the 50-yard-wide Hungarian border, replete with guard towers, barbed wire, and minefields.

Now this group — perhaps the last vestiges of the once-glorious Hungarian Abbey of Zirc (pronounced zeerts) — stood shaking silently as they dried themselves, trying to steel themselves against the cold and the uncertainty that lay ahead. They had arrived in Austria, on the brink of freedom. But they weren’t home free. They remained in the Soviet zone of occupation; only reaching Vienna would guarantee them safety. (The Potsdam Conference had divided Austria and Vienna into four zones of occupation at the

conclusion of World War II. Austrian sovereignty over these zones was reinstated in May 1955.)

A couple of hours remained before dawn. In that moment, turning back toward Hungary, reality set in: they may never set foot in Hungary again.

“I don’t even know where we are going,” Fr. Benedict thought to himself. It was true. They had been directed on how to reach a safe house in an Austrian town; but now alone, they grew confused. They began walking toward the wrong town.

In many ways, only divine guidance allowed 13 of the 21 to make it to Vienna, to the Cistercian Abbey of Stams (near Innsbruck), and eventually to Rome. While still caked in the mud and stink of the canal, strangers had stepped forward to help them.

Seven of the 13 novices who safely made it to Stams would settle, at least for a time, in Dallas. Fr. Benedict,

Br. David Balás, Br. Moses Nagy, and Br. Philip Szeitz would serve on the faculty at the University of Dallas. Br. Aloysius Kimecz, Br. Daniel Csányi, and Br. Melchior Chladek would play important roles at the prep school, especially during its first decades. Another, Br. Polycarp Zakar, would become abbot general of the Cistercian Order and, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, he would return to Hungary as abbot of Zirc in the post-Soviet era.

But eight of the 21 were sacrificed, caught by Austrian policemen as they attempted to board a bus to Vienna. Five weeks later, they arrived in Budapest,

In the first week of September 1950, 13 Cistercians arrived at the Cistercian Abbey of Stams near Innsbruck, Austria. Seven of this group would end up in Dallas: Br. Daniel Csányi, Br. Melchior Chladek, Fr. Benedict Monostori, Br. Aloysius Kimecz, Br. David Szeitz, Br. Moses Nagy, and Br. David Balás. The Cistercian at the front of the group is their Austrian host, the prior of Stams.

were tortured, put on trial, and sentenced to between four and seven years in prison.

Recognized in Europe as an intellectual, spiritual, and financial center prior to World War II, the sudden downfall of the Abbey of Zirc began during the Christmas season of 1944. While Hungary had been spared for most of the war, the desperate end to the great conflict between the Soviets and the Nazis spilled into Hungary. The “Russian front” was now moving from east to west, from the Soviet Union towards Germany — directly through the heart of Hungary.

The Siege of Budapest (December 29, 1944 — February 13, 1945) became known as one of the bloodiest sieges of World War II. When the Soviets cut the German Army off at Budapest, Adolph Hitler declared it a Fortress City; the Hungarian capital would be sacrificed in an attempt to slow the Soviet advance towards Vienna and Berlin.





While the Abbey of Zirc is located in a remote mountain village, the institution — with its five schools, many parishes, houses, and 40,000-acre estate — was recognized in Europe as an intellectual, spiritual, and financial powerhouse prior to the Soviet occupation.

St. Emeric's, the Cistercian school, its church, parishes, study house, and residences in Budapest survived, incurring relatively minor damage. But 80 percent of Budapest's buildings were destroyed, leaving the city with ruins and debris in its streets and citizens without running water, food, electricity, or heat for months.

As the front of the conflict moved inexorably towards Germany, many Hungarians hoped that life eventually would return to normal and the Soviets would return home. But history would show that the miserable state of Hungary in 1945 would be viewed in some respects with fondness. From this point forward, the Hungarian people's culture, society, and pride would be systematically smothered.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviet-installed government confiscated property, including the Cistercian Order's 40,000-acre estate, which had financed the vast operations of the Order (from churches and parishes to

schools and missions).

The days of Zirc as a freely operating institution were numbered.

Providentially, the Hungarian Cistercians already had begun to undergo some important changes internally that would strengthen their resolve to resist the Soviet onslaught.

A visitation of the Holy See in 1937-38 had prompted new constitutions and a new order of liturgy. Subsequently, monastic liturgy (e.g., community prayer) became an increasingly emphasized part of the Cistercians' daily lives. (Over the first three decades of the century, the Cistercians' work at their urban schools, away from the Abbey in Zirc, had diminished their monastic life.)

After the death of Abbot Adolf Werner on February 5, 1939, the community of Zirc elected the beloved 44-year-old

Fr. Wendelin Endrédy. The new abbot would lead the 200+ Hungarian Cistercians toward a more prayerful daily life. One day, he hoped, Cistercians might integrate their priestly, monastic, and teaching vocations more closely. But World War II and the

fight for survival during the subsequent Soviet occupation diverted a great deal of attention from this goal.



The 44-year-old Abbot Wendelin Endrédy was elected on March 18, 1939. His Hungarian name is Vendel (Vendelinus in Latin).

The idea of going to America had been proposed by a 29-year-old priest living in Eger, Hungary in the summer of 1945. A brilliant man of many passions, Fr. Louis J. Lékai was repulsed by the idea of a Soviet occupation. While many expected the Soviets to abandon Hungary by 1947, Fr. Louis believed they had more sinister plans.

"We must look forward," he wrote to friend and former Cistercian classmate, Fr. Anselm Nagy, on July 19, 1945, "and do our best with

what is left of our lives. We must work and begin to make plans. For my part, I have formed a plan which I have already communicated to our abbot.”

Establishing a foundation in America appeared to him to be the only certain way to preserve their way of life.

“I do not want to exaggerate,” he concluded his letter to Fr. Anselm, “but one may say that the survival of our community depends on our readiness to work with dedication and diligence for what we set out as our goal.”

That plan — to build a school and a monastery in the New World — was approved by Abbot Wendelin in surprisingly swift fashion. He instructed two priests to leave Hungary in 1945. Fr.

Anselm left first on an apparent assignment to continue his studies in Rome. Fr. Raymund Molnár joined him in Rome months later. Then the two traveled to America, to the small Cistercian monastery called Spring Bank in Okauchee, Wisconsin. Perhaps Spring Bank could provide a safe haven for Hungarian Cistercians to ride out the Soviet occupation. Fr. Louis, Fr. Damian Szödényi, Fr. George Ferenczy, Fr. Odo Egres, and Fr. Lambert Simon would follow them to the US.

In the meantime, the Soviet occupation spread to every corner of Hungarian life. In 1947, the Soviets declared that all educational institutions would be run by the state. The Cistercian schools became secular institutions over the course of one summer. The Soviets would target religious institutions next.

Prior to the 1950 escape of the 21 (note: 22 actually left on the morning of September 4, but one was lost on the way to the border), most Cistercians left under far less dangerous conditions. Many were studying abroad and simply never returned.

By the summer of 1950, all convents were closed and 500 nuns were delivered to the Abbey of Zirc, a facility designed to accommodate about 100.

Knowing of the Soviet plans to close the abbey and its devastating impact on the vocations of the seminarians, Abbot Wendelin approved of the hastily hatched plan.

On October 22, 1950, Abbot Wendelin was forced to hand over possession of the Abbey of Zirc to the Soviet state. Three days later, he was arrested, tortured cruelly, brought to “trial,” and sentenced to 15 years. He was kept in solitary confinement for most of his time in prison before being released after the October 1956 Revolution.

Between 1946 and 1968, a total of 42 Cistercians from the Abbey of Zirc would land safely in the US (although 10 eventually left the Order).



Fr. Louis Lekai, pictured here during his days as a popular history professor at the University of Dallas, graduated from the St. Emeric's Cistercian School in Budapest. In 1945, he initiated the idea to establish an American branch to preserve the traditions of Zirc during the Soviet occupation.

Fr. Louis, who would awe history students at the University of Dallas years later, had been pushing for an American foundation since 1945. He was still relentlessly pushing in the summer of 1953. The pioneers who arrived in America between 1946 and 1954 soon realized that they may never be able to return to Hungary. So they turned their efforts to settling permanently in America in a place where they could practice their vocations as monks, teachers, and priests.

Fr. Louis and Fr. Anselm had embarked together on the first of their exploratory expeditions in August 1949. It took them to 19 western and southwestern dioceses during a three-week period.

Fr. Louis served as the pitch man, enthusiastically touting the Cistercians' skills, while Fr. Anselm listened politely, carefully

took notes, and analyzed the prospects.

But diocesan officials who met with Fr. Louis and Fr. Anselm could be forgiven if they had some reservations about these Cistercians from Hungary.

Heavy accents, mispronounced words, and still-developing grammar shrouded the meaning of their sentences. While Fr. Louis extolled their



The Hungarian Parliament sits majestically along the Danube River. Prior to the Soviet occupation, the abbot of Zirc served as an ex officio member of the House of Lords, Hungary's upper house of representatives.

Hungarian teaching experience and advanced degrees, his listeners must have wondered how American secondary school students would be able to understand them.

(Even decades later, parents of students at Cistercian Prep School would have a devil of time deciphering the homilies delivered by Fr. Anselm at Opening and Closing Ceremonies.)

“The mastering of the new language proved to be far more difficult and required a far longer time than had been anticipated,” Fr. Louis acknowledged in a 1968 article published in *The Records of the American Catholic Historical Society*.

That first trip generated offers from both San Diego and Dallas. Fr. Louis spent four months in San Diego before concluding that the venture to create a prep school in conjunction with the planned University of San Diego posed too many financial risks. (The Dallas offer was not pursued at this time; perhaps the Texas heat scared them away.)

Despite the language difficulties, the Cistercians

clearly communicated their pride — even their arrogance — about their Hungarian lineage and their affiliation with the Abbey of Zirc.

“[Hungarian is] a language that lacks resemblance to all major idioms of the world and conveys upon its native speakers a sense of both isolation and singularity,” explained Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy in his 1998 account of the founding of the Cistercian Monastery in Dallas, Texas.

This “singularity” is captured in the old saying, which Hungarians like to quote in Latin as if it were an internationally known proverb: “*Extra Hungariam non est vita*” (“Outside Hungary, there is no life”).

The Cistercians’ intense pride in the Abbey of Zirc stemmed from the Order’s 800-year history in Hungary and its far-reaching monastic, educational, and pastoral activities.

The Abbey of Zirc first became involved in education in the late 18th century. By the 20th century, five Cistercian *gymnasia* (college prep schools for grades 5 through 12), considered among the finest schools in

all of Hungary, were scattered throughout the country. All the teachers at these schools were Cistercian monks who had been educated at the best institutions in Europe. In 1942, the abbey's 159 priests included 68 with PhDs and 91 with masters' degrees. In addition, 50 novices and junior monks were studying for the priesthood.

Their activities were financed by the abbey's 40,000-acres, an endowment that had been accumulated since the Middle Ages and was turned in the 20th century, under the care of the monks, into a well-oiled, first-class agricultural estate.

Alumni of the Cistercian schools ran many of the country's largest institutions. The Cistercians, in fact, had become so intertwined with government and society that the abbot of Zirc occupied an *ex officio* seat in the upper chamber of the Hungarian legislature.

Their proud 800-year heritage — and the Soviets' savage attempts to snuff it out — would sit like a large chip upon the shoulders of the Cistercians who escaped Hungary.

"Dear Damian," wrote Fr. Louis to Fr. Damian Szödényi early in the summer of 1953. "In pursuit of our well known goal, I will undertake an exploratory trip with Anselm in the first half of August. I beg you to prayerfully consider volunteering together with someone like Odo (Fr. Odo Egres) to undertake a similar trip to the Northwest."

"It may be a very good idea to go to Canada also which you could do together with Anselm in the last week of August so that in the first days of September we could have a more fruitful discussion concerning our future. If after having exhausted all possibilities it will appear to be more prudent to wait for awhile, I will stop pushing."

Damian prayerfully declined.

Despite all his brilliance, vision, and passion, Fr. Louis had no official authority over any of the 20 or so Hungarian Cistercians living in America in 1953.

Besides, most of the Hungarian Cistercians in America were preoccupied with the daily chores of trying simply to assimilate into their adopted land, earn degrees, or teach.

This diverse group of men — some urbane, others provincial, some liberal, others conservative, some artistic, others mathematical — had been uprooted from their homeland, deprived of family, friends, and the Abbey of Zirc. All longed for and needed some

semblance of stability and normalcy.

Fr. Ralph March, a suave and talented monk with a playful sense of humor, had already been directed to the US by his superiors in 1952. He begrudgingly left Paris, a city he had grown to love in the five years he spent there after earning his doctorate. (His dissertation on Cistercian chants remains to this day the most authoritative text on the subject.) Now, he was quickly setting down his roots in Milwaukee while running the Cistercian's study house there, teaching French at Marquette, and conducting the university

choir.

With every passing year, Fr. Louis and Fr. Anselm knew it would become increasingly difficult to uproot monks like Fr. Ralph once again and shepherd their scattered flock to a common home.

Some hope arose in 1950 when Bishop John O'Hara of Buffalo, NY invited the Cistercians to consider operating a diocesan high school. The Cistercians agreed to send Fr. Damian and Fr. Louis to Buffalo in January 1952 before a formal agreement had been signed. The hopes in Buffalo were dashed, however, when Bishop O'Hara was transferred to



The Hungarian Cistercians first came to the Spring Bank Monastery on Lake Oconomowoc in Okauchee, Wisconsin.

Philadelphia.

The situation was growing dire. The mantle of the Abbey of Zirc began to weigh on Frs. Louis and Anselm.

In 1953, most Hungarian Cistercians lived at Our Lady of Spring Bank Monastery on Lake Oconomowoc in Okauchee, Wisconsin, 30 minutes west of Milwaukee. Spring Bank had been founded by the Cistercian Order (often referred to as “the Common Observance” to distinguish it from the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, also known as Trappists) in 1928. It was the first of many foundations (including ones in South America, Africa, and Vietnam) established by the Cistercians outside Europe during this period. While Spring Bank had succeeded in generating funds for the General House in Rome, it had struggled as a community.

From their perch in Rome, officials of the Cistercian Order believed the virtually homeless Hungarians would fit nicely into the nearly vacant American facility.

But the Hungarians weren't so certain. They saw no prospects for a prep school in the sleepy resort town of Okauchee, Wisconsin or, for that matter, in Milwaukee, which already featured an elaborate system of Catholic schools feeding into Marquette University.

Asphalt and cars stretched as far as the eye could see. Inside an unairconditioned car, four Cistercians sat pondering the treeless landscape and their decision to take a side trip to Texas. Their long hot drive from Mississippi to Fort Worth in late August 1953 had screeched to a halt on a two-lane highway about an hour east of their destination. Rush hour had traffic backed up around Dallas and the heat, which had been

barely bearable at high speeds, now enveloped them in a sweaty blanket.

For Fr. Benedict, Fr. Thomas Fehér, Br. Melchior Chladek, and Fr. Theodosius Demén, this sweltering afternoon introduced them to the Lone Star State.

Just days before, they had driven from Wisconsin to a Spring Bank mission church in Mississippi to see a newly ordained Cistercian, Fr. Berthold, celebrate his first Mass. The idea of adding North Texas to their itinerary had been suggested by Fr. Thomas, who had majored in geography back in Hungary. He suggested a route back to Wisconsin that would take them through Texas where they'd have a chance to visit Fr. George

Ferenczy and Fr. Odo.

Fr. George had initially come to Texas in the summer of 1951 to attend a workshop and to visit a Hungarian friend from Budapest who was heading up the department of music at Midwestern University in Wichita Falls.

During the course of his visit, Fr. George became acquainted with several Sisters of St. Mary of Namur who were teaching at the local Catholic high school. They had big plans.

In the near future, the sisters hoped to establish a four-year, coeducational Catholic university in Dallas to replace their

junior college, Our Lady of Victory in Fort Worth. In the meantime, they had invited Fr. George and Fr. Odo to begin teaching there.

Fr. George, a dashing, concert pianist with a PhD in French Literature, had come to believe the sisters could actually make their dream come true.

For their part, the sisters seemed to think that the Cistercians were meant to come to Texas in answer to their prayers. The Sisters of St. Mary of Namur had been founded by a Belgian Cistercian named Joseph Minsart who had been driven from his monastery by the French Revolution. They also must have wondered



Fr. George Ferenczy's acquaintance with the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur eventually led the Cistercians to North Texas to help found the University of Dallas.

where else they were going to find a group of highly educated priests willing to join them in starting their new university.

As the sun mercifully began to set, the weary Hungarians found Fort Worth. Within an hour or so of their arrival, they were laughing and talking at Fr. Odo's favorite restaurant where they feasted on some unforgettable fried chicken.

Their harsh first impression of Texas softened with each mouth-watering bite.

The next morning, Fr. Odo drove the visitors to the convent of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur to see Fr. George.

"I can still remember walking up to the convent," recalled Fr. Melchior recently, "and hearing beautiful piano music coming from the basement." But the Cistercians would appreciate Fr. George's message even more than his music.

"When you go back to Spring Bank," Fr. George emphasized to the four travelers inside, "tell the fathers that this is the place where we should settle. They need educators and priests here and they would love to have us."

The fist banging on the desk belonged to 33-year-old Fr. Benedict. The usually serene Fr. Benedict, who would chair the University of Dallas physics department in a few years, was expressing himself in no uncertain terms on this cold December 1953 afternoon in Wisconsin. Across the table sat Abbot General Sighard Kleiner. The newly elected abbot general had come to Spring Bank from Rome to conduct a canonical visitation, one of his first acts in his new job.

Fr. Benedict knew Abbot General Sighard rather well, having spent the latter part of 1950 and much of 1951 in Rome after his escape with the 11 novices from Hungary. Kleiner wasted little time in rubbing the Hungarians the wrong way.

"It seems an act of Providence that the Communists have closed your schools in Hungary," he told the Hungarian junior monks as they arrived in Rome. "Now you can forget about teaching and truly become monks by concentrating on prayer and work." (By work, Kleiner meant manual labor.)

"Comments like these really got under our skin," recalled Fr. Melchior.

But this was the only kind of monasticism Kleiner recognized. He had, in fact, formed a reform monastery in Hauterive, Switzerland. It was from this Swiss abbey that he had been promoted to procurator general in Rome.

So in their meeting, Fr. Benedict found it difficult to contain his emotions, despite Kleiner's new rank as abbot general.

"Never in my life have I behaved so harshly with any of my superiors," recalled Fr. Benedict. "But he didn't listen to anyone."

The abbot general insisted that the monks at Spring Bank adhere to a schedule of prayers and agricultural work. PhDs or no PhDs, the monks at Spring Bank would not be allowed to teach; they would work in the fields.

Kleiner probably believed that the refugee Hungarians would willingly acquiesce to his reform movement, just grateful to have a place to call home. Where else were they to go?

But Kleiner misjudged the Hungarians.

At the concluding meeting of the visitation, Abbot General Sighard addressed the Hungarian monks of Spring Bank. He didn't mince his words: it was his way or the highway.

The vast majority of the Hungarian Cistercians, both young and old, chose the highway.

Upon his departure, the abbot general left behind a set of statutes that dictated the lifestyle of Spring Bank. In this document, the abbot general granted those unwilling to follow his demands permission to leave and find a new home elsewhere.

Two months later, at a February 1, 1954, conventual meeting, the exiled monks asked the abbot general to appoint Fr. Anselm as their superior and decided to accept an invitation from Bishop Thomas K. Gorman, coadjutor bishop of the Dallas-Fort Worth Diocese (Bishop Joseph Patrick Lynch lay ill in the last year of his life).

Fr. Anselm directed five priests — Fr. Damian, Fr. Benedict, Fr. Thomas, Fr. Lambert Simon, and Fr. Theodosius — to move to Texas that summer to begin preparing the foundation for a monastic community based on the traditions of Zirc. The Cistercians were going to help the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur start a new Catholic university in Dallas.

“She must have thought I smelled like a bear,” wrote Fr. Damian of two gifts he received from his sister Barbara upon their first reunion in America in 1949, “because she bought me some shaving lotion and stick deodorant. Thus my American civilization began.”

By the time Fr. Damian drove his Oldsmobile to Dallas in the summer of 1953, he had been immersed in American society for over four years. A number of assignments in a variety of locations had helped refine his speech and his familiarity with American customs.

The other four transplants were not so lucky.

“You will do confessions on Saturday, two masses on Sunday, and Monday,” the pastor of St. Cecilia told Fr. Benedict at their first meeting, “we start school.”

“But Monsignor,” Fr. Benedict said slowly, struggling just to communicate, “I don’t speak English.”

“You will have to learn quickly then,” he answered.

The days would be long for Fr. Benedict.

“I would spend the recess with the first graders,” Fr. Benedict remembered. “They were always ready to chat and babble, and they didn’t expect me to say much. I learned a lot of American speech from them.”

One day, the cook at St. Cecilia’s, an African-American woman, pulled Fr. Benedict aside at the refectory.

“I saw you on the bus yesterday,” she said. “You were sitting in the colored section. Don’t you know better?”

“I was thrown into the water,” Fr. Benedict acknowledged of those first years in Dallas. “It was sink or swim. It was exciting and I enjoyed it very much.”

Not all of the transplanted Hungarians, however, enjoyed the many challenges of assimilating into the American way of life. Unlike most of his brothers, Fr. Thomas was a reluctant émigré who had to leave Hungary or face a long prison term on drummed up charges of “anti-democratic propaganda.”

Fr. Thomas and Fr. Damian spent that first fall in Texas teaching at St. Edward’s Academy for Girls.

“It was very difficult for him,” reflected Fr. Damian in 1969, “he really suffered, but at St. Edward’s Academy, the girls were polite and well-disciplined.

They did not take advantage of Thomas’ poor English.

“Later when he was teaching in our Preparatory School, he was lost amongst the boys; he became their fun priest. He was frightened of the students and was not capable of disciplining them.”

The Cistercians liked to enjoy themselves as well at their monthly gatherings in Fr. Benedict’s room at St. Cecilia’s Parish (the only one of the bunch to have an air conditioned room). They played the traditional Hungarian card game of Tarok and talked before dining at The Torch, a well-known Greek restaurant located just blocks away on



On May 19, 1955, Bishop Thomas Gorman consecrated the Cistercians’ first chapel in Dallas, located in the library of Bishop Lynch’s former home at 4946 Swiss Avenue.

Davis. Then they’d return for more Tarok.

“We always had a glorious time,” remembered Fr. Damian in his memoirs. “We were the first Cistercian ‘torch’ of this city. We had a lot of enthusiasm, strength, and love to burn.”

The Cistercians were serving as priests and educators. All that remained was to gather the scattered under one roof so they could begin praying together as monks.

The library of Bishop Lynch's former home at 4946 Swiss Avenue was filled on a sunny Ascension Thursday, May 19, 1955. Priests, nuns, and laity had come to celebrate along with Bishop Gorman the promise that the Cistercians were bringing to the Diocese of Dallas-Fort Worth.

Bishop Gorman had made the house available for rent to the Cistercians a few months after the death of Bishop Lynch in August 1954. Fr. Damian and Fr. Thomas had begun the process of cleaning it up and transforming it into a monastery, complete with a chapel in the exquisitely wood-paneled library.

Earlier in the day, Fr. Melchior had celebrated his First Mass, just two days after arriving in Dallas from Wisconsin, and nearly a week after having been ordained at Spring Bank. He had chosen to wait to celebrate his First Mass in the community's new home.

At the open house that afternoon, the bishop blessed and inaugurated the monastery and chapel of the Cistercian Fathers of Dallas (as they called themselves at the time).

"From here, through your talents and spiritual endowment as a group and as individuals," he said, "there will flow forth into every corner of this diocese the spiritual character which you possess.

"It is a genuine source of satisfaction to know that here will be accomplished, day after day, the Holy Office of the Church in our behalf. We feel sure, too, that this will be a house of study, a center of scholarship, a place of learning."

"Your coming among us will be a blessing," he added. "As a result of your ministry, there will grow up a sturdier, a wiser, a more spiritual generation of priests, religious, and people in the Diocese of Dallas and Fort Worth.

"Again, my dear Fathers, I bid you a thousand times, 'Welcome!'"

Gorman's remarks reflected many practical and personal aspects of the bishop's desire to invite the Cistercians to his diocese.

First, the Dallas-Fort Worth Diocese stretched from Lubbock and Amarillo to Texarkana. He needed priests to cover this gigantic territory adequately.

Second, a highly educated man who earned degrees from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and at the University of Louvain in Belgium, speaking flawless French, Gorman

understood the value of education. During his tenure, he built 25 new parochial schools, Bishop Dunne and Bishop Lynch high schools in Dallas, plus other high schools in Fort Worth, Tyler, and Wichita Falls, not to mention his role in the founding of the University of Dallas in 1956 and Holy Trinity Seminary in 1965.

He also seemed to appreciate the Hungarians' talents, their promise, and their heartache.

"It is our hope that as your work grows and develops [here]," Gorman said, "it will in some measure recompense you for what must be and what will always be the pain of separation from your native homeland.

"We sincerely trust that God will again smile upon that country and bring to it peace and freedom, both civil and religious."

The next day, the monks began a full monastic schedule, living according to the ideals that Fr. Louis had first expressed nearly ten years before when the Soviets first began their 44-year stay in Hungary.

For the remainder of 1955, Prior Anselm worked to bring all the Hungarian Cistercians to Dallas under their new corporate identity, the "Cistercian Monastery Our Lady of Dallas" (which had been incorporated on March 25, 1955).

A little more than a month after the May celebration, Fr. Anselm received word that the Holy See had appointed him as the "Vicar (delegated superior) of the Abbot of Zirc" and given him jurisdiction over all the monks of Zirc who were no longer in Hungary and did not belong to Spring Bank.

The community now began to face the last phase of the foundation: building a monastery of their own, helping the University to open its doors, and, eventually, starting a school of their own like those the Cistercians had run in Hungary for centuries.

"At the border in 1950," Fr. Benedict reflected, "I decided that where Providence leads me, that's where I will live and work. I will do my best there. I will be at home there."

"I never regretted settling in Texas," Fr. Benedict said. "It is still strange, but this makes it interesting and adds some spice to life."

Just like that first fried chicken dinner in Fort Worth in 1953.

Chapter 11

Worlds apart

BY BRIAN MELTON '71 and DAVID STEWART '74

“Two weeping nuns came to see me,” Bishop Gorman recalled of his April 1955 meeting with the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, “and said, ‘Here, take it.’”

It was the University of Dallas (UD) and included “the responsibility [for managing and operating the institution], the \$2 million-plus raised, the thousand acres, the Our Lady of Victory accreditations, the president we hired, and our continued service.”

Every time the nuns pondered the scale of their proposed enterprise, it seemed to grow tenfold. The sheer scope of their plan for a college had blossomed beyond their wildest dreams and outstripped their capacity to manage it. (Although the sisters gave up control, they continued to play important roles at the university for decades.)

While the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur had invited the Cistercians to join them in building the

University of Dallas, Bishop Gorman would now be calling all the shots. And to the surprise of no one who knew him well, he assumed the project with zeal.

In addition to the \$2 million-plus (raised in under three months early in 1964 by civic leaders Ed Maher and Eugene Constantin), Gorman inherited the thousand acres assembled by the fund-raising team. The land had been chosen from 22 candidates and had been effectively promoted by John Carpenter, who owned 160 of the choicest acres (including the highest point called Turkey Knob). He already envisioned a highway running through the property, providing a stately entrance to the development he and his son were planning call Las Colinas.

It is not known whether Fr. Anselm knew of Carpenter’s plans to modify the eastern terminus of SH 114 from Northwest Highway at Harry Hines (the



The University of Dallas campus circa 1960. The Cistercian monastery is visible in the top center portion of the photo.

current route of Spur 348) to a location along Hwy 183. Construction of the route of SH 114 did not begin until 1964. It would separate the highlands of the university from the lowlands of the Cistercians.

Weeks before the February 4, 1956, groundbreaking ceremonies, Fr. Anselm went to Gorman's board with a request that seemed eminently reasonable: fifty of the thousand acres for the Cistercians; sufficient for seclusion yet still close to the new university.

The board countered with an offer of ten acres, and Gorman backed them.

Fr. Anselm responded, not with another number, but with a strong justification for his request. The new Cistercian monastery, he explained, would be more than just a dorm for priests who taught at the university. Anselm envisioned a full-service monastery that required facilities for novices and theology students, eventually a secondary school (*gymnasium*, in the tradition of Zirc). One day, perhaps, a church would serve as the centerpiece of a parish.

The board responded with the observation that Jesuit High School managed with only ten acres across from Holy Trinity Church at the corner of Oak Lawn and Blackburn. Fr. Anselm patiently pointed out the differences between the Cistercians and Jesuits, emphasizing the Order's 900-year-old monastic traditions and their intent to develop extensive educational facilities.

He granted that 40 acres would be sufficient for these purposes.

Gorman nodded in agreement, the board approved, and it looked like the deal was done. But shortly thereafter, the bishop unilaterally lowered the offer to 35 acres and then finally delivered only 34 — “half in a flood plain and a veritable jungle,” noted Fr. Benedict Monostori.

But Prior Anselm had, after years of searching, carved out a home in America for the Cistercians of Zirc.

“The abbot's decision not only stood the test of time, but in fact we now know just how lucky we

were,” emphasized Anselm’s successor, Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy. “The goal was to build a monastery in a remote and isolated area with no immediate neighbors. Fifty years ago, that was not a problem. Today, even though enormous development is taking place nearby, we are still in a remote and isolated area with no immediate neighbors.”

Adams and Adams, the same architectural firm that designed several major buildings at UD was retained to begin drawing up plans for the first wing of the new monastery — 15 rooms, a small chapel, refectory, kitchen and office space, all equipped with central air conditioning, much to everyone’s relief. And even though the official deed to the property would not be handed over until autumn, the technicality was immaterial: “Our Lady of Dallas” was becoming a reality.

“I got the impression that everybody was scared, including me,” said Gene Curtsinger, describing the mood of the fledgling staff as they worked to assemble the university’s first-ever curriculum. A World War II veteran with a Ph.D. in English from Notre Dame, Curtsinger was hired to do double duty, serving as both UD’s first English department chair and academic dean. “I guess I overdid it on my job application, because I didn’t even know what an academic dean was.”

Any initial nervousness on his part was quickly soothed by the powerful, confident assurance projected by the Cistercians.

“Fr. Ralph had given an impressive talk on Sartre in Milwaukee at Marquette that I happened to attend,” remembered Curtsinger. “So I was surprised to see him again and heartened to know that he, along with others, would be on our faculty.”

Curtsinger was even more impressed when he was invited to attend a dinner one weekend at the Swiss Avenue residence.

“We sat around the table and the conversation roamed from English to Hungarian to French to German, complete with multilingual puns and intellectual asides that left me in the dust. I had complete admiration for those men from that moment on. They weren’t beginners in the education field by any means; they were thoroughly bright professionals.

“You couldn’t always understand them,” he

acknowledged with a chuckle, “but they knew what they were doing.”

While plans for the university progressed and construction continued feverishly on the new campus, negotiations with Bishop Gorman on an employment contract for the Cistercians were not keeping pace. Fr. Anselm grew anxious, aware that his leverage declined as the buildings went up. He also knew all too well that, while many of the monks had teaching experience back in Hungary and Rome, several lacked the degrees required for full professor positions in America.

“Prior Anselm was a skillful negotiator, especially given that he was still so young at the time,” said Abbot Denis. “But the Cistercians had no money, status or backup support then. He was completely at the mercy of the university and, to a great degree, the contract he signed reflected that powerlessness. It was better than nothing,” Denis added quickly, “but it was by no means the perfect answer to their prayers, and he knew it all too well.”

Reluctantly, Anselm signed a group contract with the University of Dallas on June 23, 1956, and with that one pen stroke, nine Hungarian Cistercian monks suddenly comprised exactly half the core faculty of eighteen teachers at the new institution. The “volume pricing” of the group contract left the proud Hungarians feeling undervalued.

Anselm clearly had hoped that, as the monks grew into their positions and earned additional degrees, their pay would increase to reflect their expanding contributions. “That’s why Abbot Anselm suggested I go to Fordham for a degree in physics,” explained Fr. Benedict, “and I was glad to go and get it.” [He received his Ph.D. in physics from Fordham in 1964 and headed up the physics department at UD as acting chairman (1962 to 1966) and as chairman (1971 to 1986)].

But the monks would have to wait two decades for an improved contract that provided compensation approaching their market value.

Grumbles about pay inequities notwithstanding, the monks were much better off than they’d been a mere two years before, spinning their wheels in Wisconsin. With secure, if temporary, roofs over their heads, plans for a permanent home well underway and job opportunities both at UD and in various parishes aplenty, they were well on their way to a brighter future and to fulfilling their educational apostolate.



The founding faculty of the University of Dallas leaned heavily on Cistercians. In the back row, to the right president Kenneth Brasted a several nuns are (l-r): Fr. Ralph March, Br. Benedict Monostori, Fr. Christopher Rábay, Fr. Theodosius Demén, and Fr. George Ferenczy. Fr. Odo Egres is standing second from the right. Fr. Anselm Nagy is seat on the far right with Gene Curtsinger seated next to him (the other priest on the front row is not a Cistercian. Both Fr. Damian Szödényi and Fr. Louis Lékai are obscured.

On Sunday, September 22, 1956, the University of Dallas opened its doors for business. And while the day was mercifully sunny, the year's extended drought yielded to a soggy first semester for the 96 students and 18 teachers alike.

"Rain, rain and more rain," recalled Curtsinger. "We had no sidewalks and after no rain for months, the mud just stuck like glue to the bottom of your shoes in layers. I'd walk from the car to my office and be seven inches taller."

Four nuns of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur

were counted among the original faculty and administration of the University of Dallas. Sister Mary Ellen served as the university's first Dean of Women until 1971. Sister Mary Margaret served as university Registrar until 1973. The first librarian, Sister Martin Joseph, served until 1961; she was charged with the responsibility to collect, organize, and shelve hundreds of books in time for the official opening. Sister Francis Marie served the longest term, teaching English until 1985. (And while not an original faculty member, Sister St. John Begnaud taught English and developed the programs for seminarians, retiring in 2001.)

The nuns were joined by nine Cistercians: Fr. Odo

Egres, Fr. George Ferenczy, Fr. Louis Lékai, Fr. Ralph March, Fr. Benedict Monostori, Fr. Anselm Nagy, Fr. Christopher Rábay, Fr. Damian Szödényi, and Fr. Theodosius Demén.

Fr. Damian, one of the first Cistercian monks to come to Dallas (and later the first headmaster of Cistercian Preparatory School), taught philosophy and psychology that first year. He also served as the university's first dean of men. However, his job description failed to encompass tasks like fetching a new pair of slacks for President Brasted, who accidentally drove his car into a mud-swollen ditch and was forced to tramp to his office covered in muck.

"Damian was one of the most cultured men I'd ever met," Curtsinger remembered. "His attitude was always great, but he was more accustomed to dealing with intellectual issues. But that's not to say he didn't have a streak of the dramatic in him. He came into my office one morning, waving around the recommended psychology text and refused to use it, declaring, 'This is potty training!' I told him, fine, teach what you want. And he did; it was, of course, excellent."

Fr. Damian continued to teach at the new university, but he quietly yet firmly declined the opportunity to serve another term as Dean of Men. His ability to adapt to new situations was mirrored by the flexibility of his countrymen. But while the Hungarians were more than willing to adapt to American culture, they were steadfast about discipline and study routines.

"The Cistercians didn't put up with any nonsense," recalled Curtsinger. "Fr. Lambert taught chemistry, and if a student didn't show up at 8 a.m., he'd go right over to the dorm and get him out of bed. And Fr. George always told me that if I needed to have any course staffed, just give him the textbook and a ten-minute head start and he could teach anything. And I believed him. He was smart enough to do it."

Perhaps the most difficult adjustment for the Cistercians was adapting to what they perceived as a certain laxity about testing and student evaluation methods.

Fr. Benedict, in particular, remembered being "horrified" by true/false and multiple choice quizzes. "Abomination! As a student in Hungary, you stood in front of a panel of teachers and answered the questions they put to you. Only in this way could the examiners be assured that the student knew the material. But in America, testing was simply

a guessing game. I never got used to it," he said, adding with a chuckle, "and I still don't like it."

"The Cistercians simply had no experience with American traditions in higher education," added UD's associate provost and longtime historian Sybil Novinski, (also a Cistercian Prep School mother of five and grandmother to four). "So they perhaps had a little disdain for it at first, especially in high school, because they weren't quite sure students were prepared. At first, that perception caused a few tensions between students and monks," she admitted, "but it all worked out just fine, even with sorting through the 'interesting' language difficulties."

"The Cistercians brought an international sophistication to this brand-new school out in the middle of nowhere," she continued. "To be able to start a university with bright, educated monks, with traditions reaching back to the 11th century, was just amazing. The university's intellectual reach and aspirations were strongly influenced by the Cistercians, and everyone knew that, even back then."

Curtsinger echoed Novinski's sentiment, "I'm sure we could have made it without them. We just would have been a lot dumber and slower. They were an amazing group of men."

Sitting on the edge of his seat, 15-year-old Gyuri ("Georgie") Marton tapped his foot anxiously. The minutes until the end of the school day passed like hours. As he counted down the minutes, something caught his eye. Outside the second-story window of the Piarist school he attended near the center of Budapest, hundreds of young adults were gathering in front of the radio station.

When the clock finally struck 1:40, young Marton sailed down the stairs and out the door with the rest of his school chums. (He might have stopped to savor the moment had he known that he'd never set foot in a Hungarian school again.)

As they spilled out on to Mikszáth Kalmán tér, the students breathed in a startling street scene that conjured up a carnival atmosphere. People walked arm-in-arm carrying flags, singing songs, and enjoying the emerging sunshine on this otherwise foggy day. The sense of fun and freedom in the air must have struck these children of Soviet oppression as odd, even if they had no idea why.



After a taste of freedom between October 23 and November 4, 1956, the Hungarian Revolution was crushed savagely by Russian bombs and tanks. Calls to western powers like the United States went unheeded.

“I was oblivious to what was happening,” Fr. Bernard Marton would recall in his diary of the events. “I was not interested in politics.”

Walking out of the center of the city toward his home Tuesday, October 23, 1956, young Marton witnessed the inception of an historic political event. This peaceful demonstration would develop quickly into the 20th century’s most inspiring example of, as Senator John F. Kennedy would say in 1957, man’s “unquenchable thirst for freedom.” Spontaneously, impulsively, Hungarians expressed their disdain for Soviet rule. The spirit of this day (and the eleven days that followed) would help shape geopolitics for the next 30 years and foreshadow the eventual, inevitable collapse of the totalitarian Soviet empire.

Somewhere on the streets of Budapest, amidst the thousands of students Marton passed on his way home that day, a third-year law student was marching.

Twenty-year-old Miklós Farkasfalvy (Abbot Denis) had joined the demonstration along with most of his law school classmates. They were showing support for reforms to a Soviet system that in just eleven years had robbed Hungarians of their freedom, their institutions, their economic vitality, and their happiness.

This demonstration had been made possible by a series of events triggered by the death in 1953 of Joseph Stalin. As a new Soviet leadership began to feel its way, Stalin-styled repression gradually relaxed somewhat. Restrictions were eased in 1954, tightened in 1955, and then eased again. All this reflected the power struggles within the Kremlin. In 1956, news spread that the First Secretary of the Soviet Union’s Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, had publicly denounced Stalin’s reign of terror. Hungarians began daring to hope.

“We were marching to put political pressure on the government to reduce the terror,” Abbot Denis

Farkasfalvy commented recently.

While young Farkasfalvy's passions did not include politics, his daily activities were profoundly impacted by the Soviet's stranglehold over Hungarian life.

After graduating from a Benedictine school in Pannonhalma (one of the few Catholic schools left in existence in Hungary), Farkasfalvy had hoped to pursue his love for French literature. But the state sent him instead to law school.

Unenthusiastically he studied the law four days a week while the rest of the week he studied for the priesthood. But his pursuit of a priestly vocation had to be kept secret since the state had outlawed religious orders (with the exception of a few closely watched religious groups). He had taken his first vows on September 1, 1956, but none of his classmates, and not even his own father, knew this.

While Farkasfalvy pursued the priesthood, other students at the university immersed themselves in the rapidly changing politics of 1956. Over the summer, they formed a discussion group within the Communist Party's youth organization.

This group, called the Petőfi Club (named after the 19th century revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi), attracted intellectuals and writers who began to explore bold issues like freedom of press and political prisoners. The meetings attracted increasingly large numbers and the discussions became ever more open and audacious. A list of demands started to take shape.

The wheels of change were also turning in some other Eastern bloc countries, especially Poland.

On October 22, in fact, Hungarians had learned from their newspapers that the Communist Party leader in Poland had successfully negotiated with Khrushchev to earn more control over Polish internal affairs.

This news prompted Hungarian student leaders to organize the October 23 march so that they could

pay tribute to the Poles and seek concessions of their own. Young Farkasfalvy spent the entire afternoon demonstrating on the streets in support of the cause with his law school chums.

But as the sun went down and the rhetoric heated up, Farkasfalvy left, believing the crowds would soon disperse.

"I had promised my mother I would pick her up and walk her home from my aunt's house," Abbot Denis recalled.

Crowded around their home radio that night, the Farkasfalvy family, along with listeners all over the country, learned that the demonstration was taking a surprising and violent turn. Around 9:30,



In the opening hours of the Hungarian Revolution, 20-year-old Miklós Farkasfalvy (circled, Fr. Denis) was captured by TIME-LIFE films marching with his law school classmates. As that first day drew to a close, violence broke out.

demonstrators toppled Budapest's 30-foot statue of Stalin and simultaneously, in another part of town, they battled secret police for control of the radio station.

Blood was now being shed; the revolution was on.

The demonstrators had become, in a matter of hours, Freedom Fighters. (Hungary's Freedom Fighters were named TIME magazine's "Man of the Year" in 1956.)

At midnight, all government announcements suddenly ceased, replaced by a single piece of classical music, playing over and over.

“Clear out or you will be shot,” announced the commanding officer over a loudspeaker at a Hungarian military camp outside Budapest. The officer was addressing a large group of townspeople who had assembled to persuade members of the Hungarian army to join the Freedom Fighters in the unfolding revolution.

The officer’s threatening admonition met with disbelief from the townspeople as well as from the soldiers under his command, according to András Kereszty (Fr. Roch), who was serving out the military commitment of his college ROTC program at the camp.



Fr. Lawrence Sigmond was appointed vicar by Abbot Wendelin Endrédy and fulfilled the abbot’s duties during his prison term. He directed all the activities of the underground seminarians between 1950 and 1956.

News of the events in Budapest had spread across the country quickly. But within the confines of the military base, officers had attempted to portray the rebellion as the work of hooligans or fascists. Now, the townspeople had made it perfectly clear that citizens were fighting for Hungarian independence and freedom.

As the commanding officer’s threat hung in the night air, each soldier silently considered his options.

“I cannot, I will not shoot my countrymen,” thought young Kereszty.

As the command was given to shoot, all the soldiers emptied their bullets from their guns onto the dusty ground at their feet.

The crowd cheered and broke through the gate. The Hungarian Army soldiers joined the Freedom Fighters.

“I was just elated,” Fr. Roch recalled. “I couldn’t believe this was real.”

As Kereszty’s division arrived in Budapest on October 27, the last Russian tanks were limping out of town.

“We really believed they might be leaving for good,” he said. “We spent the next several days searching for members of the secret police who were in hiding.”

Within the week, Kereszty’s military commitment came to an end and on November 3 (one day before the Soviets would crush the rebellion), he removed his uniform for the last time.

“No one knew what was going on during the last days of October,” recalled Abbot Denis. “People had run out of food, so both hunger and curiosity took us out of our homes. There wasn’t any reliable information, just rumors.”

On October 29, young Farkasfalvy walked to the university where he was elected to serve on a revolutionary committee and given a weapon. It was his chance to become

a Freedom Fighter.

But he refused.

"I realized," Abbot Denis said recently about his thinking at the time, "that an armed rebellion against the Russians had no chance to succeed." This cold pragmatism could be traced to Fr. Lawrence Sigmond, his novice master who not only knew that the young monks were not supposed to take up arms, but felt quite responsible for the safety and future of his clerics, who were dispersed throughout the country.

"Fr. Lawrence sent word that we should not participate in the violence," said the abbot. "We knew that an armed rebellion was completely hopeless."

Of course this was not the popular sentiment at the time. Everyone wanted to believe that the revolution would produce a free, independent Hungary. There were some encouraging signs, too.

Thousands of political prisoners had been released, including Cardinal Mindszenty and Abbot Wendelin Endrédy, the Abbot of Zirc. But, of course, as law and order broke down, many common criminals were also set free.

On November 1, the revolutionary government of Imre Nagy (*pronounced Náj*) declared Hungary a neutral country and asked the United Nations to recognize it. But the UN was preoccupied with a multi-nation dispute over the Suez Canal.

Fr. Lawrence's practical, prudent advice reflected lessons learned from spending six years leading a far-flung religious community under a totalitarian regime that sought its extinction. He had developed a number of approaches to avoid detection by police or informants: disembarking busses and trains a stop or two prior to his destination, dividing his flock of clerics into small independent groups that knew little about each other, crossing out entries in his small appointment book so they were legible only to him, teaching his monks never to say their names in the telephone, and sending messages orally through intermediaries. Between 1950 and 1956, in fact, no novices or clerics were arrested.

Still, he knew that he and his charges were just one miscue away from prison or worse. Just weeks before the revolution, three of them had had a brush with an informant.

On September 1, 1956, Fr. Lawrence was treating Farkasfalvy and his novice mate to breakfast in a modest café in Budapest. They had just completed a

three-day retreat for their first vows. While savoring dessert, they were accosted by a man who exclaimed, "Oh, what a nice family gathering: two young men with their teacher!" He snapped a photo and slipped away.

Since Abbot Wendelin's arrest in October 1950, Fr. Lawrence had shouldered a heavy load under the most difficult circumstances. In addition to serving as the novice master of the suppressed Cistercian Order, he also served as Abbot Wendelin's vicar and substitute during the abbot's imprisonment.

His attention to the safety of his novices would play a key role in helping many escape safely to the West.

And his leadership, along with his spiritual guidance, would influence many of his novices for the rest of their lives.

In Fr. Lawrence, the heart and soul of Zirc remained vibrant and vigilant despite the harshest of odds.

"Fourscore and seven years ago," declared a defiant voice in clear English, "our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal ..."

Crackling noises briefly drowned out the voice on the Hungarian radio broadcast at a little after 7 pm on Sunday, November 4, 1956.

Soviet forces had begun moving into the Hungarian capital at 4 am on this chilly Sunday. By mid-morning, they had peremptorily subdued Budapest, their tanks careening through its wide boulevards on a mission of destruction and terror. The revolutionary government of Imre Nagy was quickly defeated.

Radio calls for help to Western powers and the United Nations, which had grown increasingly desperate over the last few precarious days of freedom, were never answered.

"The brave men living and dead who struggled here," the radio voice could again be heard temporarily over the static, "have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract ..." More noise and static. These were the last words heard over Hungarian free radio until 1989.

Using the *Gettysburg Address* to eulogize the



Some of the Cistercians who escaped Hungary in 1956 are pictured at the General House in 1957 (front row, l-r): Br. Denis Farkasfalvy, Br. Matthew Kovács, Br. Pascal Kis-Hováth, Fr. Julius Leloczky; (back row, le-r): Br. Zsombor Pollner, Br. Roch Kereszty, Br. Aurel Mensáros, and Br. Romuald Verbay.

Hungarian Revolution emphasized the parallels to America's bloody struggle over democratic principles and made one ponder the unknowable (e.g., How long would it take Hungarians to break the shackles of servitude? What if the world's greatest democracy had chosen to intervene?).

Huddled in a neighbor's basement to avoid being strafed by MIG-15s on November 4, Antal Marton and his family began to discuss the idea that their 15-year-old should leave the country. Over the next few days, a plan would be hatched.

Cistercian clerics began hearing from Fr. Lawrence.

"How's your Italian?" asked Fr. Lawrence in a phone call to Br. Denis Farkasfalvy.

Similar messages were being transmitted through a variety of means to clerics around the country.

György Kovács (Fr. Matthew), a 27-year-old cleric living in Székesfehérvár, 40 miles southwest of Budapest, was working in a home for elderly priests. He received a message in mid-November to come

to Budapest to see Fr. Lawrence. Kovács had the opportunity to attempt his escape in 1950 soon after joining the Abbey of Zirc, but he had chosen to stay. Now, he felt certain his master would recommend he leave. He packed his bags even before seeing Fr. Lawrence.

But Fr. Lawrence did have one surprise for Kovács. "It is time you take your solemn vows," Fr. Lawrence said.

So in his tiny Budapest room, with no pomp or circumstance, Br. Matthew made his solemn vows on November 29, 1956.

"When you get to Rome, they will know that you are a solemnly professed Cistercian," he said.

In Győr (*pronounced dyür*), which is located halfway between Budapest and Vienna, a young librarian/cleric named Gyula Lelóczky (Fr. Julius) was notified by Fr. Placid Csizmazia of Fr. Lawrence's message. (Fr. Placid would come to Irving in the sixties and teach at the prep school, where he influenced many Cistercian students, including Peter Verhalen.)

Fr. Placid, whose day job was teaching Russian, served as one of Fr. Lawrence's co-workers. He taught the clerics Latin and philosophy; but now, with the revolution coming to an end, he would help the brothers seeking to leave.

Young Lelóczy's decision to flee Hungary would be especially difficult.

He would have to leave behind his widowed mother (his father had died in 1953), 18-year-old sister, and his 14-year-old brother.

The Lelóczy family had already suffered greatly.

Since the family had owned an elegant pastry shop for decades prior to the Russian occupation, the state classified the family as "exploiters."

His father was forced into a marginal job as a collector of scrap metal and his mother was put to work in a sauerkraut factory. Meanwhile, Gyula was prohibited from attending a four-year university. He did succeed in attending a two-year college and was finally granted the opportunity to operate a one-man library near his hometown.

Now the stark reality of the revolution's aftermath left him tormented.

"I didn't think I could leave my mother alone," Fr. Julius recalled. But she insisted.

"I have seen how you have struggled to follow your vocation," she said. "It is best for you to leave."

Deep within a mountainous forest in the northwestern corner of Hungary, a set of eyes quietly watched Gyula Lelóczy hike towards the Austrian border on November 11, 1956. Lelóczy had been guided to this route out of Hungary by a fellow librarian from the nearby town of Sopron. The forest would provide cover for an escape. It also provided cover for those stalking escapees.

This part of Hungary juts oddly into Austria. The border lies between three and four miles (as the crow flies) from the western edge of Sopron.

Lelóczy had traveled about a mile when he spotted the set of eyes that were tracking him on this cold, overcast morning. He quickly identified them as belonging to a German shepherd. As the dog turned toward his camp and ran off to communicate with his masters, Lelóczy had no time to waste.

"I started running for my life," Fr. Julius remembered. "There was no trail so I just ran west for

10 to 15 minutes before I collapsed."

Shortly after regaining his breath and believing that he had evaded the soldiers assigned to this area, Lelóczy joined four high school students who knew the area and also were headed for Austria.

Along the way, they encountered a self-assured man in a Hungarian police uniform who believed he had already crossed into Austria. When informed that Austria lay a couple of miles to the west, he asked if his group — a loud crew of 15 including grandparents, parents, and children carrying heavy bags — which was lagging behind, might follow them towards the border.

It was determined that they could, but Lelóczy and the high school boys were concerned about all the noise they were making. They recommended that the group follow at a distance of 100 yards or more.

"Stop!" called a voice in Hungarian not long thereafter. Lelóczy and the high school boys froze and listened. The large group behind them was arrested.

The Hungarian Army soldiers were carrying out their orders, but only half-heartedly.

"I believe that group would have been brought back to Sopron and set free," Fr. Julius said recently. "They wanted to show that they were doing their jobs. That group probably escaped a few days later."

Almost at the border, the five nearly made a costly mistake. A trip wire had been set between two trees. Such devices were used to trigger a flare that would notify guards of an escape and its location.

At the border, the forest had been cleared in an area about as wide as a large highway. The soil was plowed and raked regularly to show footprints. On this day, many footprints could be seen at this crossing between two guard towers, headed into Austria. Lelóczy and the four high school boys weren't sure whether the guard tower about 100 yards away was occupied. They decided to make a run for it.

Austria contrasted starkly with Hungary. It was almost as if a black-and-white world now appeared in color.

"The peacefulness was shocking," Fr. Julius remembered. "No one was afraid. People dared to speak without checking around for signs of an informant first. It was like two different worlds, just a few miles apart."

Fr. Placid had told Lelóczy to make his way

to Heiligenkreuz Abbey, the oldest continuously operated Cistercian Abbey that sits about 30 miles south of Vienna.

He was the first of eleven Cistercians from Hungary who would find refuge there.

This number does not include the November 21 arrival of Antal Marton, who would become a Cistercian several years later in America.

Few of the Cistercians escaping Hungary knew each other, except for those who had been part of the same novice class. Fr. Lawrence had hidden their identities to protect everyone.

Farkasfalvy and fellow cleric Béla Mensáros (who would teach as Fr. Aurel at the school in Irving until 1983 before leaving the priesthood) arrived the day after Marton.

They had jumped on a food truck in Budapest, which carried them along with a large number of escapees towards Austria.

Despite being stopped by Soviet guards along the way, the food truck continued to make its way towards the border unimpeded. It became clear that money could smooth one's journey out of the country.

"In effect, a little industry sprang up to carry refugees towards the border," Abbot Denis said. It operated like an underground railroad, Hungarian style. Approximately 200,000 Hungarians fled the country after the October 1956 uprising.

Pascal Kis-Horváth, who had been arrested while trying to escape in 1950, arrived safely at the Abbey of

Heiligenkreuz on November 24, followed by Kereszty on November 28, and Kovács on December 16.

At the Austrian abbey, the refugees were provided with all the necessities that they had had to leave without. Within days, they boarded a train to Rome and were immediately thrown into theology classes at the Benedictine University of Sant'Anselmo while they lived at the Cistercian Order's General House.

"It was wise to begin classes immediately," said Abbot Denis recently. "It would take us some time to digest the huge changes that had just occurred. We were happy but confused."

(Fortunately for the Hungarians, language was not a problem in Rome. The classes at the university were taught in Latin so all were able to follow along and take notes without difficulty.)

Back in Hungary, the families of the young Cistercians were glad to receive messages over Radio Free Europe of their sons' safe arrivals in the West.

But their hearts were broken.

Years later, Fr. Julius' mother would relate how after his train left Győr, she collapsed in prayer at their local church which featured a statue of the *Pietà*.

"I felt," she recalled of that day looking at Jesus in his mother's arms, "very much like Mary must have felt after losing her son."

Chapter 12

Generation gap

The car carrying Fr. Anselm Nagy turned off of Rome's sunny Piazza del Tempio di Diana and rolled to a halt under the shade of the Cistercian Generalate's gatehouse.

By the time the 42-year-old grabbed his hat and coat and made his way into the sunlit courtyard on this April afternoon in 1957, a group had hurried down from their rooms to greet him.

These young refugees of the October 1956 Hungarian Revolution — including Br. Roch Kereszty, Br. Matthew Kovács, Br. Julius Lelóczy, and Br. Denis Farkasfalvy — were just the people Fr. Anselm had come to see.

Officially, Fr. Anselm traveled to Rome to attend a meeting of the Cistercian Order's *Defnitorium* that assembled annually amidst the blooms of the Roman spring. Fr. Anselm was making his second appearance

at the meeting since assuming his new title as the Vicar (the delegated superior) of all the monks no longer in Hungary (except for a very small group living at the Cistercian house in Spring Bank, Wisconsin).

But he also came to initiate a relationship with the 1956 refugees. Since their escape from Hungary in November, they had become his responsibility and subject to his authority.

While armed with few specifics, Fr. Anselm knew they were studying for their doctorates in theology, and he expected them to join his community of Cistercians in Dallas.

Greeting Fr. Anselm in the courtyard, the young brothers eagerly drank in every detail of their new superior's appearance, words, and demeanor.

"He looked very distinguished," Fr. Julius recalled, "quite different from us."



Fr. Anselm Nagy (in the black clergy suit) gives a “kiss of peace” to Br. Matthew Kovács in the courtyard of the Cistercian General House in Rome in April 1957. Those awaiting their greeting are (l-r) Br. Denis Farkasfalvy, Br. Roch Kereszty, and Br. Zsoombar Pollner. Fr. Polycarp Zakar (right) observes.

Despite the grueling transatlantic flight, Fr. Anselm appeared dapper in the crisp black suit of the American clergy (which the brothers had never seen before). His finely combed gray hair was slicked back, emphasizing his forehead and horn-rimmed glasses.

His delicate features, impeccable manners, and quiet voice oozed aristocratic smoothness.

Naturally, the twenty-somethings thought Fr. Anselm quite old (he was 42).

“He gave us the impression of a world traveler,” added Fr. Julius.

Fr. Anselm shook hands with each brother and delivered a formal kiss of peace along with a distant embrace in the courtyard, his coat still draped over his arm, his hat in hand.

“I understand you are a law student,” Fr. Anselm said to Br. Denis Farkasfalvy. “Perhaps you will one day study canon law.” He smiled and turned to the next brother without waiting for a reply.

Fr. Anselm had not had time to read the biographical statements each brother had been asked to prepare for him. Otherwise, he would have known that

Farkasfalvy detested studying the “systematized lies and hypocrisy” of Soviet law. Law school had simply served as his cover as he studied for the priesthood (and a way to avoid military service).

After dinner, Fr. Anselm gathered the young brothers in his room at the General House.

“Don’t be afraid of America,” he began. “I need you in America.”

Fr. Anselm continued to speak but the words that followed were lost on the brothers. Their young minds wandered.

The stench from the old heater in Fr. Lawrence’s claustrophobic room greeted Br. Roch on a chilly day in early November 1956. He sat down next to Fr. Lawrence at the room’s small table, sandwiched between his bed and dresser.

The Cistercian novice master got to the point quickly but delicately.

“There is a chance for you to go to Rome *now*,” said Fr. Lawrence, emphasizing this window might not

remain open long.

“But I would like to stay in Hungary,” pleaded Br. Roch, who had completed his stint in the Hungarian People’s Army only weeks before.

“Even if the situation was normal,” Fr. Lawrence nodded knowingly, “I would send you to Rome.”

As a former Cistercian student and a brother since 1951, Br. Roch knew Fr. Lawrence well. Since the closing of the Abbey of Zirc and subsequent arrest of Abbot Wendelin Endrédi, the mantle of Zirc rested with Fr. Lawrence. He was the vicar of the abbot and novice master.

“I want you to be a theologian,” Fr. Lawrence declared softly.

“My mother won’t want to let me go,” complained Br. Roch, who was living at home with his father, mother, and sister.

“I will talk to her.”

Fr. Lawrence, whose “day job” was translating technical texts from Russian into Hungarian, visited the Kereszty home and compassionately explained to Mrs. Kereszty the extraordinary opportunity that lay before her son.

She knew of the many sacrifices made and the dangers faced by this saintly man on behalf of her son and so many others; she found it impossible to refuse him.

With his mother’s approval, Fr. Lawrence instructed Br. Roch, “Tell them in Rome that you are there to study theology and that you will return to Hungary once you’ve completed your studies and the Soviets have left.”

On October 8, 1950, a 14-year-old oblate named Miklós Farkasfalvy beheld an eerie glimpse of the Cistercians at their magnificent Abbey in the mountainous village of Zirc. He had come with his fellow oblates from the Benedictine school in Pannonhalma to receive his habit as an oblate (a person informally associated with a religious order who strives to grow in their spirituality).

The imposing baroque structure, once the home of a hundred or more monks plus staff and novices, echoed with emptiness. Only Abbot Wendelin along with his secretly appointed vicar Fr. Lawrence, some co-workers, and 27 novices remained.

All of them were packing. The Soviet regime had

dictated that the Cistercians vacate the premises by the following week, October 15. Still, the community of nearly 40 gathered four times a day for the divine office and twice for common meals.

“The abbot received us briefly,” Abbot Denis later recalled in a memoir, “and the next day in a very small private ceremony, Fr. Lawrence put on us the grey habits of the oblates which we wore for less than 24 hours.”

According to custom, the youngest — Miklós — received his habit last. It would be 40 years before another would receive a habit in Zirc.

Despite the gloomy circumstances, Abbot Denis later wrote that “there was still an incomprehensibly happy atmosphere, translucent with a spiritual awareness of God’s presence, a spirit of exuberance and youth.

“Fr. Lawrence appeared to me as the Gate Keeper of God’s Garden,” he recalled in his memoir, “Fr. Bálint (who supervised this group of oblates) as my guardian angel, Abbot Wendelin as the Great Master of the Mysteries. And the rest of us loving brothers were involved in the most beautiful enterprise: monastic life in the service of an oppressed and persecuted church.”

On a late summer Sunday afternoon in 1953, Gyula Lelóczky introduced himself to a gentleman dressed in a white suit. The meeting near the statue of Beethoven in a Budapest park had been carefully orchestrated once Lelóczky had declared his intentions to become a Cistercian.

For three hours on a park bench, the gentleman in the white suit, Fr. Lawrence Sigmond, learned about the young man’s calling and described the difficult life of an underground religious.

Undeterred, Lelóczky began his postulancy the following week, attending novice classes every Sunday in a detached home in Buda, where a family with one son in the Cistercian Order had rented a spare room to two young men (who became Lelóczky’s novice mates).

“It was like a regular school,” recalled Fr. Julius recently. “One priest taught us the Psalms and the Bible, one taught the history of the Cistercian Order, and another provided spiritual instruction.”

On weekdays, Lelóczky lived the life of a university student. This was his cover. On Sundays, he would tell

his aunt and uncle, with whom he lived in Budapest, that he was studying at the university library.

“I dreamed of a Benedictine way of life so that I could stay in the same place (as opposed to a diocesan priest),” Fr. Julius reflected. “But the monastery and community life were only a dream for us.”

While Fr. Lawrence may not have known what he was training these young men for, he maintained a strict novitiate: no movies or novels. On the streets, they were not even to look at shop windows or advertisements. Each was expected to meditate, read spiritual texts, and keep a journal.

On Feb. 22, 1954, within the confines of their small “classroom,” seven young men received their religious names, a white scapular, and the all-white habit of the Cistercians during a Mass celebrated by Fr. Placid (Fr. Lawrence was absent).

In April 1957, Fr. Anselm Nagy (with the hat and coat), superior of the Our Lady of Dallas monastery, walks in Rome with three young refugees of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution (l-r): Br. Roch Kereszty, Br. Denis Farkasfalvy, and Br. Julius Lelöczky.

“We only were allowed to wear our habit in that room on that day,” remembered Fr. Julius.

Another important precaution was taken -- each religious name was revealed only to the recipient. No one but the Cistercian fathers leading the novitiate would know their religious names, safeguarding the identity of the young men in case their signed pledges were discovered.

“We knew very little about the organization that Fr. Lawrence was running,” recalled Fr. Julius. “He did not want us to have too much information that could endanger the others.”

Altogether, there were four cells of groups of novices and brothers studying for the priesthood by 1956, adding up to between 15 and 18 young men.

While the young men may not have known each other, they all knew and loved Fr. Lawrence for his spiritual guidance, his love for them, and his belief in their futures.

Life for this 47-year-old consisted of one cat-and-mouse game after another with persistent, if not totally competent, Soviet security forces. He went to extraordinary lengths to avoid having his secret work



threaten any of those around him.

“Fr. Lawrence,” said Fr. Roch recently, “risked his life daily on our behalf.”

“We only risked a year or two in jail,” he added.

“When you are young,” insisted Fr. Roch, “you enjoy going against the stated order of things. We enjoyed adventure, especially for the sake of Christ.”

As Fr. Anselm concluded his pitch to the brothers at the General House in April 1957, he hoped that their little talk had gone well. He had communicated to the brothers that they were needed in Dallas; they would have a home and a job. They would not have to spend five or more frustrating years searching as Fr. Anselm, Fr. Louis, and other pioneers had.

But with 20 years and lots of history separating them, the brothers viewed things differently.

“We did not realize that Fr. Anselm was in a mode of trying to persuade people to join him,” Abbot Denis said recently in reflecting on the conversation in April 1957. “We did not leave Hungary because he had a problem.

“He didn’t seem to care why we left Hungary,” he added.

“It was just too soon for us to begin thinking of such a future,” Abbot Denis emphasized. “We were still grieving about the world we had left behind. We were still traumatized and we needed to be handled with kid gloves.”

Fr. Anselm’s perceived message, “You must go to America, like it or not,” struck a sour note with the instructions delivered by Fr. Lawrence, “Stay in Europe so you might return to Hungary one day.”

“We could not even locate Dallas on a globe in those days,” recalled Abbot Denis.

Most of the brothers studying in Rome had not known each other in Hungary, but their common experiences and new closeness led to fast friendships.

They shared with each other their activities as underground seminarians and their unanimous affection for Fr. Lawrence (and his lieutenants) who represented the martyred Zirc so well.

They knew each other’s sadness in parting from their families, friends, and homes.

Over the next several years, they compiled their experiences from their four years in Rome into a diary. Capturing tales, photos, and cartoons of youthful

exuberance, inside jokes, a summer in Paris, trips to abbeys in the Alps, and a vacation to Venice, the three volumes symbolize the bonds the brothers enjoyed.

Their stance on going to America softened during this time.

The young men had begun looking to the future, and during the early sixties, the future appeared dismal in Hungary and in Europe.

They hoped to preserve a chance to return to Hungary and to Europe; but for now, they accepted America as their next destination. (Fr. Anselm’s stories of the snakes, skunks, and scorpions that plagued the facility did, however, give them pause.)

In Dallas, a second wing had been added to the monastery, and a third was contemplated. Fr. Anselm hoped that soon the community might earn recognition as an independent priory or abbey.

In pursuit of this goal, Fr. Anselm asked all Cistercians outside Hungary in 1961 to profess a vow of stability to Dallas (in place of their vow to Zirc). Most did so willingly, although some in Dallas and in Europe preferred to maintain their ties to Zirc.

Towards the young men in Rome, however, Fr. Anselm felt differently. They represented the long-term future of the community, and he believed they should pledge their stability to Dallas.

Of the three, Br. Denis most vehemently took exception to Fr. Anselm’s position. The former law student believed stability to be a private matter, one outside the authority of his new superior.

Legalities aside, the issue kicked up a sea of emotions for Br. Denis and his two colleagues.

The brothers were prepared to give themselves to Fr. Anselm and the work in America (which they had never even visited); but, their very identities were tied up in the issue of stability.

Their difficult lives as underground seminarians had been inspired by an imprisoned abbot and nurtured by a vagabond novice master.

They felt they owed their vocations to Abbot Wendelin, Fr. Lawrence, and others of the persecuted church in Hungary who refused to buckle under Soviet oppression.

The brothers wanted to honor these beacons of faith, duty, and defiance that had shaped their values. So at their final vows, they pledged their stability to the Abbey of Zirc.

The refugees of 1956 arrived to Our Lady of Dallas between 1960 and 1964, each receiving an assignment from Abbot Anselm to further his education. Most were slotted for spots at the school according to their previously demonstrated interests and education. Only Fr. Roch Kereszty with his outstanding reputation as a theologian was considered for service at UD. Fr. Denis, whose interests included biblical theology and French literature, received the assignment to earn a Master's in mathematics, the same field in which the abbot had earned his Master's. While not in line with the young monk's interests, the assignment reflected the abbot's respect for the young man's abilities.

"Only with a degree in math or science," the abbot later explained, "could you gain enough respect to become a leader in the school." The Hungarian Cistercians had a history of respect for mathematicians and scientists. Abbot Wendelin Endrédy of Zirc had been a very popular and effective teacher of math and physics. Fr. Julius Hagyo-Kovacs, who managed the 40,000-acre estate of Zirc, earned nationwide respect for his canny financial management.

The abbot mentioned that he had made it a habit to work every problem (whether assigned or not) in each chapter. He recommended Fr. Denis do the same. The abbot was counting on a new math teacher in the school by the fall of 1966. That would give Fr. Denis three years to earn his bachelor's and master's at TCU while he learned English. The monk who had just years earlier rebelled at pledging his stability to Dallas earned his math degrees in two years. He began serving the school as a math teacher and form master of the Class of '74 in the fall of 1965.

While Fr. Denis' scholastic achievement and work ethic won him praise, his accomplishments and arrogance also annoyed many inside the monastery and out.

"The use of the term 'community' in the description of the life and work of Our Lady of Dallas," wrote Fr. Louis Lécai in 1967 in an article for the American Catholic Historical Society, "should not be interpreted as suggesting uniformity and unanimity among the 30 some individuals.

"Some of the older generation (born between 1900 and 1918), had the good fortune of having received the traditional Hungarian Cistercian education in a still undisturbed and flourishing European monastic

environment," Fr. Louis added.

"Others joined the Order either during the turmoil of the War or at a point when Zirc fell apart under the blows of the Communist hammer."

In addition to their varied experiences, the elders could be forgiven if they envied the younger generation's energy and relative ease in picking up the English language. While much had been accomplished by the older generation, the younger Hungarians only seemed to focus on the improvements to be made. They didn't know how hard things had been in the fifties.

But more concrete issues brought the differences in the abbey to a head.

"Since the operation and future expansion of the school demanded even greater financial exertions," Fr. Louis explained in 1967, "the monks postponed indefinitely the completion of their cloister by the addition of the still missing abbey church."

The "financial exertions" grew even larger in 1971-72, not long after Fr. Denis was elevated to the role of headmaster of the school. The abbot and Fr. Denis championed the construction of a new gymnasium to which the abbey would contribute \$200,000 of the \$750,000 price tag.

This investment in the school's future called into question the monks' future.

"Some Cistercians felt that our language and cultural barriers made us totally incapable of handling American kids," Fr. Roch said of the priests who supported the university. "Some, having just finished their doctoral dissertations, felt that teaching in a secondary school was below their level of education." Many Cistercians made excellent college professors and clearly belonged at the college and graduate level.

On the other side were the priests who believed the community should teach secondary school just as Cistercians had done for centuries in Europe. Among these, Fr. Denis led the charge. He had argued strongly that a gym was crucial for the survival of the prep school. Abbot Anselm agreed.

The explosive atmosphere was fueled partly by two Vatican II pronouncements enacted in the early seventies. One changed the monastery's financial outlook.

Since coming to America in the fifties, Abbot Anselm had generated revenue through "honorariums," Cistercians would say special masses, primarily for those whose loved ones had passed away. When the



In 1976, shortly after the leadership crisis had been resolved, the monks of Our Lady of Dallas monastery gathered for a photo.

number of requests for such masses increased, Abbot Anselm enlisted the help of the well-stocked Cistercian monasteries in Europe (including the dispersed monks of Hungary). He sent one-half of each donation to Europe for fulfilling the request.

In the fifties, the typical donation for such a mass was 50 cents. By the sixties, one dollar became customary. Through hundreds of thousands of these small transactions, Abbot Anselm generated the money to fund the construction of the monastery's three wings, and to contribute very significantly to the construction of the Middle School, the Upper School, and the gym.

Vatican II, however, would now prohibit the sharing of donations, putting a stop to the monastery's practice and slowing the flow of funds to a trickle. With neither the school nor the university providing market compensation for the priests' services, the abbey's financial future became clouded.

Vatican II also dictated that every religious community review its constitution. In light of the continuing debate over the community's direction, the new financial dilemma, and the recent donation to the school, the salient article in the constitution was the abbot's lifetime term.

These issues prompted the community to hold a vote in 1973. The monks considered three options: to devote themselves to the prep school, to devote themselves to the university, or to build a parish and engage in pastoral work. None were mutually

exclusive. The community voted the prep school as the community's first priority, but it was far from unanimous, much less conclusive.

In accordance with that vote, Fr. James and Fr. Robert (the monastery's newest members since Fr. Bernard), were sent to the prep school to teach and become form masters. It soon became clear that both were better suited for the University of Dallas. This misfire helped perpetuate the debate over whether the prep school should remain the monastery's primary focus.

In five years at the prep school, Fr. Denis had overcome significant obstacles to put the school on a positive track. His relentless efforts to pursue the lofty standards of the founders had won him support from parents, students, and faculty. But in February 1974, just as the school was "turning the corner," he ran into a brick wall at the monastery.

In a spectacular run-off election, the monks voted to block Fr. Denis from a position on the Abbot's Council, the body that serves as the board of directors for the monastery. Fr. Denis was convinced that his effectiveness at the school would be undercut if he were unable to influence decisions at the highest levels of the monastery. So he asked Abbot Anselm to appoint him to an *ex officio* position on the Council.

"I want you to be the headmaster," the abbot said, "but I will not appoint you to the Abbot's Council

because it would contradict the community's wishes." Feeling his own power base disintegrating beneath him, Abbot Anselm clung to what was left of his own authority.

The vote against Fr. Denis reflected the unhappiness that a sizable group in the community felt with events since the vote in 1973. While the school had its new gym, the monks were still saying mass in a suffocating room that had served as their "temporary" chapel for almost twenty years. Since the proposal to become a parish had been voted down in 1973, there appeared little hope that the monks would ever build a church. Their "temporary" chapel was looking more and more like their permanent church home. This dismal facility gave the community little chance in attracting young men interested in a priestly vocation.

Some monks apparently also felt that the school and Fr. Denis had become too powerful within the abbey.

"I interpreted the move as an attempt to force me either to resign or to serve as a lame-duck headmaster," Abbot Denis remembered.

Fr. Denis resigned. Some in the abbey termed his departure a sabbatical, but no return was scheduled.

Abbot Anselm appointed Fr. Henry Marton to serve as headmaster, but Fr. Henry agreed to accept the duties of headmaster for one year only. He would be helped — and a certain amount of continuity provided — by his brother, Fr. Bernard Marton, who continued to serve as assistant headmaster, as he had since 1971.

Fr. Denis made arrangements to pursue his passion for Biblical study in a city he had grown to love while studying for the priesthood. He would seek a degree from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

Like the abbot, long-time board members Bryan Smith and Pat Haggerty felt such an endeavor would benefit Fr. Denis and, in the long run, the abbey and the school.

"Haggerty and I agreed that the Pontifical Biblical Institute would be the kind of challenging intellectual environment that might soften his personality a little," Smith said. "We were anxious for him to become easier to work with.

"This was important not just for the school in the short-term. The long-term survival of the abbey and the school depended on who would succeed Anselm as abbot," Smith insisted. "If Denis was to be in the running, he needed better interpersonal skills."

The beauty of life in Rome and the challenges of the Pontifical Biblical Institute provided a welcome change of pace for the newly "retired" Fr. Denis. And through the end of 1974, the school appeared to be running smoothly without him.

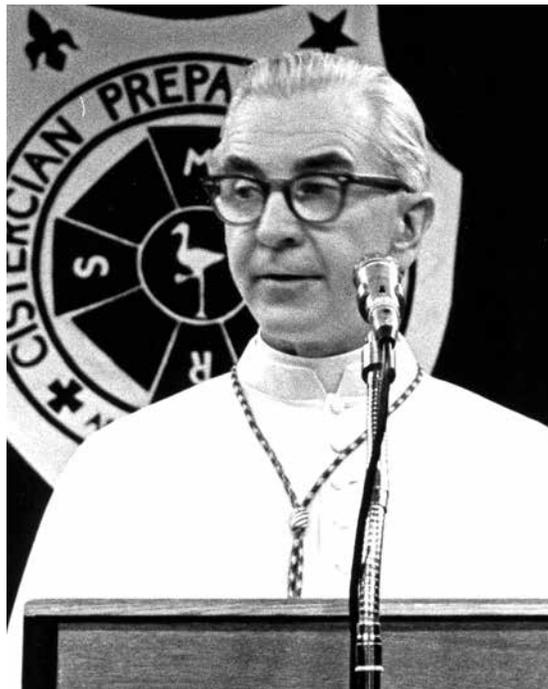
"I never had any wish to leave behind the prep school," Fr. Denis reflected. "But if my superior had said, 'Everything is going well and there is peace at the school,' then I would have said, 'Okay, give me another job.' I would not have resented it."

He also could have stayed in Rome and followed his love and substantial talents for Biblical study.

But a letter from Fr. Julius early in 1975 carried some surprising news. The abbot

general, who arrived at the monastery at the end of January to hold one of his regular canonical visitations, had found the monastery in upheaval.

The abbot general decided to call for a vote of confidence, to determine whether the abbot - who was holding office for life, in accordance with the old constitution - had sufficient support to continue. The abbot did not receive the required majority. After having led the community for nearly 30 years, Fr. Anselm would have to content himself for the time being by speculating how the community might reinvent itself. In two emotional stabs at authority (a recurring theme in America during the seventies), the



Abbot Anselm Nagy's continuing support for the school would, temporarily, cost him his job when he lost a vote of confidence in 1975.

monks had managed to depose their two most capable leaders in the matter of a year. They would now be free to sink or swim without them.

The abbot general returned to Irving in April to conduct an election for an administrator to lead the abbey during a one-year cooling-off period. Fr. Christopher Rábay won that thankless job of trying to hold the community together until the following April when an abbot would once again be elected.

“In the fall of ’74, Peter showed up in Dallas and told me that he wanted to be a priest,” remembered Fr. Roch of his former student Peter Verhalen ’73. Busy and unable to talk at that moment, Fr. Roch asked Verhalen to come back. “A few weeks later I was supervising a study hall in the freshman classroom when, unexpectedly, Peter walked into the almost empty room and announced, as if in a daze, ‘I want to enter the monastery.’ Then it was my turn to fall into a daze. What should I say? I recommended that he wait until the next fall.” Fr. Roch’s hesitation was understandable.

By the fall of 1975, when Verhalen officially joined the monastery, the monks had reinstated Abbot Anselm and Fr. Denis had resumed his position at the helm of the school. But the school was not out of the woods.

“As an alumnus of the prep school,” Fr. Denis said, “Peter had an awareness of the importance of the school.” Br. Gregory Schweers, who joined the monastery at the same time as Br. Peter, also followed the path toward teaching at the school. Although novices have no political power in the monastery, their decisions to teach at the prep school helped swing the balance toward the prep school.

“It was providential,” said Fr. Denis, “that these two novices were open and interested in the school

and had no other goals than to teach at the school. Peter could have said, ‘I really feel I need a doctorate, and I will be a Greek professor at UD.’ But that didn’t happen.”

The arrival of Br. Peter and Br. Gregory also proved to be a turning point for the school in another way. While the school’s math curriculum excelled from the start, the English curriculum had lagged far behind. Some supporters of the school felt that the English program, not the math program, was the key to success in secondary education. How, they asked, could Hungarians succeed at teaching English to American students?

Fr. Denis had made a start by hiring two fine English teachers in the early seventies — Stephen Housewright and Ronnie Shepherd — but the need was still great.

So while the two brothers may have had other ideas, Fr. Denis strongly suggested that they complete their masters’ degrees in English (Fr. Peter would later obtain his masters in classics as well). By the time Fr. Gregory and Fr. Peter joined Tom Pruit in 1981, the school was well on its way towards forming an excellent and stable English department.

As election year for the new abbot approached in 1988, tension mounted. At age 73, Abbot Anselm was technically eligible for the next two years;

but his name was not proposed. Many of the monks who disliked Fr. Denis in the seventies still disliked him in the eighties. Others believed Fr. Denis to be the monastery’s best problem-solver.

After an inconclusive first round of voting, Fr. Christopher, the abbey’s prior, found himself in a dead heat with Fr. Denis after the second round.

“It was a tense moment,” Abbot Emeritus Denis allowed recently. Fr. Christopher had other ideas; he stood up and addressed the community.

“Please do not vote for me, because I would not



In the abbatial election of 1988, Fr. Denis and prior Fr. Christopher Rábay (above) were tied after the second round of voting. At that point, Fr. Christopher told the monks he would not serve if elected.

accept it if I was elected.”

Fr. Denis was elected with two-thirds of the votes in the third round.

It is remarkable that in the midst of trying to resolve their complex issues in the seventies and eighties, the monks never shared their burdens and continued to bestow gifts upon the school and the university. At the school, the priests contributed their services, as they had since 1962, taking virtually nothing in return. These donations freed up funds that would be used to attract and build a talented lay faculty. The monks also contributed significantly to all of the

early building projects, including the \$200,000 gift to the building of the gym in 1971.

The monks offered gifts of even greater value, however. As teachers, form masters, college professors, and administrators, each gave a shining example of obedience, self-sacrifice, love, humility, and dedication. The significance of many of these gifts would become clear to most Cistercian students only years, sometimes decades, after graduation.

Chapter 13

A place in the clouds

Snow was falling on New Year's Day 1990 in Minturn, Colorado (not far from Vail). Sitting with his family at Mass, Jere Thompson '74 drank in the charm of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, which was built in 1913. As he contemplated the conviction and courage it must have taken to build the sturdy wooden structure in this small mining town, he was struck.

"It's time for us to build Cistercian a chapel," Thompson thought.

"It was a real strong feeling," he remembered. "There was no hesitation and no fear. I immediately turned to thinking about a plan."

Thompson and classmate Jim Moroney '74, both 33 years old, had led the campaign to raise funds for the Science Building six years earlier. They could do it again. The Andres family had been involved in the construction of the Science Building.

They could do it again, this time with 32-year-old Wade Andres '75 leading the way under the banner of the newly formed Andres Construction.

On his return to Dallas, Thompson couldn't wait to share the idea with his form master, Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy.

"Unless we build a church," Thompson emphasized, "the school won't continue to be for the next generation what it has been for us."

Thompson then laid out the plan: alumni would raise the funds, an alumnus would build it, and an alumnus (Fr. Peter Verhalen '73) would say Mass in it.

"I experienced the joy of receiving a true gift," the abbot remembered. He had been dreaming of a church to attract vocations, but did not know how it could be possible.

A crucial piece of the puzzle, however, was still

missing. During the planning and construction of the Science Building, Thompson and Moroney had come to understand the importance of smooth communication with the architect. They agreed that a significant project like the church required an architect who understood Cistercian, and the Cistercians.

Thompson recalled a story in the Spring 1989 *Continuum* written by Peter Smith '74. The headline read, "Cunningham excels as innovative architect."

Amidst a bustling lunch crowd at the old Dixie House on McKinney Avenue, Thompson and Smith met Gary "Corky" Cunningham '72.

"We didn't know much about Gary's work at that point," Thompson admitted. In fact, the pair had seen little of the 35-year-old architect since he graduated from Cistercian.

"But we knew," added Thompson, "we wanted an alumnus to be our architect."

When Cunningham enthusiastically agreed, an interview was scheduled with Abbot Denis.

"After just an hour," recalled the abbot, "I knew that Gary was eager and had the right ideas about the process and project." The abbot then set up a meeting with the community of monks to present the alumni's idea for the church and their architect.

"They were caught totally by surprise," remembered the abbot. "The alumni of the school were proposing a gift we had not even asked for, most never hoped for, and many never considered even possible." The community enthusiastically approved the idea and the architect.

So now, with his team of alumni assembled, Thompson turned his attention to more big issues: How would they pay for it and what shape would it take?

Providentially, the alumni's proposed gift inspired a similarly unexpected gift from Lynn Northrup (grandfather of J.D. Northrup '96 and Robert Northrup '00), who agreed to underwrite limestone for the project from his quarry in West Texas. The gift changed everything.

"We could not have even dreamed of a church built of stone without this gift," insisted the abbot.

Nevertheless, the design process seemed to have bogged down at a November 1990 meeting of the building committee in Cunningham's conference room, located in the choir loft of an abandoned church near downtown. The design (and the relationship between Abbot Denis and Cunningham) was not progressing as hoped.

"Gary and Fr. Denis were having trouble coming to agreement on some key issues," recalled Wade Andres.

"What you guys need to do," Andres said, "is go to Europe and see some of these ancient chapels."



Bélapátfalva "captured an attitude," said architect Gary Cunningham '72, who traveled to Europe with Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy.

The abbot and the architect arrived at the General House in Rome on New Year's Eve 1991, weary but unable to sleep much. The Italians were celebrating the occasion by exploding fireworks well into the first several hours of 1992. Cunningham likened that first night in his 8' x 12' cell with one small window — his first tactile experience with monastic life — to a "Twilight Zone" episode.

The next morning, Abbot Denis brought Cunningham to the office of Abbot General Polycarp Zakar. Both men lit up a warm, lively conversation, mostly in Hungarian. Fr. Polycarp had served as Br. Denis' superior (and all of the Hungarian

brothers) after his escape from Hungary in 1956.

For these two Hungarian abbots — men whose talents and scholarship had sent them to the tops of their respective organizations — this was a moment to cherish. Cunningham could sense the pride and joy they felt for each other's current endeavors. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the abbot general was orchestrating the re-opening of the Abbey of Zirc. And with the maturation of the American branch, the newly elected abbot in Texas was working with his architect on a church there that would honor the Cistercian Order's oldest architectural traditions.

The abbot general brought out what was apparently a Hungarian delicacy (perhaps pig's feet) to honor the occasion, and which Cunningham, in the interest of building relationships, nibbled judiciously.

Then the pair visited the first two stops on the architectural itinerary Abbot Denis planned — outstanding Italian examples of Cistercian architecture from the 12th and 13th century that lay just 80 miles southeast of Rome — the Cistercian Abbey of Fossanova and the Cistercian Abbey of Casamari, located about 20 miles apart.

“Their uniform geometry and simplicity were stunning,” recalled Abbot Denis. Both admired the way light entered the churches through the windows.

Each featured a rose window on their façade. Cunningham insisted the rose window was not original and suggested that it must have been added later. On this point, the abbot disagreed. (Later, the debate over the rose window at Fossanova was settled by a historian. It was indeed an addition and architecturally not part of the early Romanesque style.)

The next stop was Vienna, where the pair traveled to the Abbey of Heiligenkreuz (“Holy Cross”), which was founded in 1133, and is the oldest continuously occupied Cistercian monastery in the world.

The Romanesque façade, naves, and transept were dedicated in 1187; they are considered Austria's most famous examples of this austere style. Nuns then drove Abbot Denis and Cunningham to the Abbey of Lilienfeld before heading to Hungary. It was in Hungary, not surprisingly, that the trip reached its emotional and architectural highs.

The first few destinations in Hungary were not designed to enlighten Cunningham's understanding of 900-year-old Cistercian architecture. But they proved no less important.

After checking in at the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma, where the abbot received his high school education between 1950 and 1954, the pair was struck by how empty the facility appeared. Neither visitors nor monks could be spotted anywhere. The abbot began leading Cunningham on a tour of the church when a staff member notified the pair that the community was gathered for the election of a new abbot. There was, however, one monk who was too ill to participate in the election. That monk, Fr. Mike [Mee — keh] Jámbor, hoped they would drop by the infirmary for a visit.

Fr. Mike had taught the abbot French at Pannonhalma and for the young Farkasfalvy, it had “developed into a true relationship with an intellectual mentor. Fr. Mike respected and loved me unselfishly.” He was the last friend that Br. Denis visited on his way to the Austrian border as he escaped Hungary in 1956.

The sight of his dear teacher brought tears to the eyes of the abbot. Unable to sit up, Fr. Mike greeted the abbot warmly, and engaged the visitors in conversation about their trip and their impressions.

While the abbot was clearly moved, Cunningham was feeling something too; a tug that was bringing him closer to understanding the immutable relationship between monks and their students, no matter their respective ages.

At Zirc, just 20 miles south of Pannonhalma, Cunningham witnessed another kind of testament to longevity and survivability. The Abbey of Zirc, which the Soviets had taken over in October 1950, was full of activity when the pair from Dallas arrived. For the first time in 40 years, the Cistercians were taking back their church and were in the first stages of making it their own once again.

Fr. Denis and Cunningham had the opportunity to visit with another very old monk. Fr. Vilmos (William) Szabó, an ornithologist now near the



The Northtrups' gift of the limestone changed everything. By making a stone church possible, thoughts turned toward centuries-old Cistercian architecture.

end of his life, was an old friend and novice mate of Abbot Anselm. His knowledge of Dallas and his interest in the project fascinated Cunningham.

Like Abbot Polycarp, Fr. Mike, Fr. Guido, and others, Fr. William was keenly interested in the church project, Abbot Denis, and Cunningham. They spoke little of themselves and wanted to know only how they could help.

Cunningham was beginning to conclude that the simplicity and strength of the 12th century Romanesque architecture reflected the selflessness and longevity of the relationships monks have with those around them.

“It dawned on me,” Cunningham said, “that those relationships I had with the monks — they were like the relationships I had with my parents — they weren’t going to fade.”

“I learned that I couldn’t assume that I knew who the monks were,” Cunningham added. “They helped me come to terms with where I came from as a Cistercian student and they helped me understand what is truly special about the monks.”

The encounters were giving Cunningham “a whole different take on this thing.”

From Zirc, they traveled to Budapest, where Abbot Denis stayed with his sister and Cunningham rested in a nearby hotel. The following day, a Cistercian named Fr. Konrád drove them two hours or so northeast of Budapest.

By this, the final leg of their architectural journey together, the easy and trusting relationship between the abbot and the architect had fully bloomed. For six days, they had talked non-stop, discussing European history, Cistercian history, Benedictine history, monasticism, architecture and much more.

Cunningham had also felt the silence of the

Cistercians, lived (for a few days) the rhythm of monastic life, and sensed the light as it crept across church floors between morning and evening prayers. He had witnessed privileged moments between Abbot Denis and his former superior, a beloved mentor, an old friend of Abbot Anselm, his sister, and many of his friends.

He had seen the Cistercians moving back into their abbey in Zirc.

The next stop, Bélapátfalva (about 100 miles from the Ukranian border), was purported to be the most well-preserved 13th-century Cistercian church in Hungary.

The road leading north from Eger to this tiny village can be beautiful, winding through wine country and then straddling the Bükk National Forest. But on this foggy January day, the roads were wet and the going slow, making the drive longer than expected.

“I felt a little nervous,” remembered Cunningham of their arrival, “like I did on my first day walking around the Irving campus, which was still a muddy, wet job site.”

“At both places, I sensed a quiet, desolate place in nature.”

The abbey that had once adjoined the church at Bélapátfalva fell into ruins in the 16th century. To add to the feeling of desolation, the visitors

found the 13th-century church locked. They appeared to be out of luck.

Fr. Konrád went searching to find someone with a key, but first scrounged up a ladder so that Cunningham could take a look through the windows and crawl around the roof.

The chapel quickly impressed the architect as “a serious precedent for the chapel. It had been dismantled and rebuilt, yet it still captured an attitude — a quiet place in the clouds.”



Bringing light into the chapel would be as important in the 20th century as it was in the 12th century.



“It was a very emotional project for everyone,” remembered Wade Andres. “It was a big deal for Gary, for our career (Andres Construction), and for the alumni who raised the money.”

The scale, Cunningham decided, fit in nicely with the site in Irving. He was intrigued by the alternating rows of grey and red stones at the main entry (similar to the entry at Fossanova).

When Fr. Konrád found keys, they toured the nave where the pews, made of baltic birch, left an impression.

As with many of the other examples of 12th and 13th-century Cistercian architecture, the church in Bélapátfalva featured a rose window. Once again, Cunningham believed the rose window was not original. The abbot concurred.

Upon the return of the abbot and the architect, Thompson was eager for a design to help with the fund-raising efforts. The abbot counseled patience. “Some things,” he suggested, “just have to evolve over time.”

There was one more trip — this one to West Texas — that Cunningham wanted to take before getting

down to work. He wanted to see the stone for himself.

The trip included a hair-raising plane ride from San Antonio followed by snake shooting and beer drinking on a ranch near Midland. It was a far cry from the decorum of the European trip, but the limestone, and a brand new tool to cut and extract the blocks, excited Cunningham.

“When I came back,” he said, “I knew what I was going to do.”

Months before, Abbot Denis had provided Cunningham with many books related to church building. A Vatican II document stated three primary tenets: honesty, craftsmanship, and humility. Cunningham’s design would embody all three, freshly inspired by his experiences in Europe.

“Can you think,” Cunningham remembered mulling to himself, “about a building that will last 800 years?”

“It must have,” he decided, “an attitude that will last.”

“It was about understanding that the



The Abbey Church as photographed after its completion in May 1992.

building's physicality was not driven by the physical," he suggested, "What makes the building very important is the monks."

As the design came together — fashioned not with a limestone veneer, but actually built using huge limestone blocks — Cunningham understood that it would be historically important, especially in the context of North Texas. "How many buildings are built this way?" he asked.

"It has the weights and dimensions of the pyramids," he said of the blocks that measure 2' x 3' x 6' and weigh 2½ tons.

To give the monks a sense of the inside of the chapel, Cunningham's team built a model of a scale that fit over the monks' heads "like a lampshade." The model created a comical scene, but effectively communicated the feel of the design.

True to his convictions, Cunningham did not include a rose window. Some monks were disappointed.

"It's about the importance of the Romanesque era," Cunningham explained to the community of monks. "It's about a total humility in which all light is kept colorless."

"A rose window is not in keeping with who you are," he emphasized. "You're about being

focused and the commitment to work."

"Gary was incredibly good at selling his point of view," remembered Abbot Denis.

The conservative appearance of the design concerned some of the monks, but Cunningham assured them that the building would be thoroughly modern from a construction perspective.

"In those discussions, the monks gave me the respect of their equal," Cunningham remembered, "and I could feel their love and trust."

By the time construction began in August 1991, the architect and the builder were feeling the pressure. Cunningham's vision of an ancient design constructed in modern-day America would require thoughtful planning, on-the-fly improvising, and old-fashioned craftsmanship. It would test the talents of all to execute the unusual design within the budget, on schedule, and to the satisfaction of their former teachers and fellow alumni.

"It was a very emotional project for everyone," remembered Wade Andres. "It was a big deal for Gary, for our career (Andres Construction), and for the alumni who raised the money. The budget was tight."

Building the church with load-bearing stone walls was both medieval and novel, but it created a problem: nobody had any experience with this form of construction.

Cunningham and Andres went to West Texas to learn as much as they could about the stones.

“Understanding how the stone was going to be cut, affected the way Gary stacked it on the building for a logical sequence,” said Andres. “We even went out and measured the stones to ensure they would fit together, grouped the darker stones (weathered by lying nearer the surface), and put them in sequence for delivery.”

Part of the building’s unique character would be defined by the banding of darker and lighter stones as well as by the craggy edges of the limestone that Cunningham refused to chisel into a smooth surface. He opted instead to show the stone’s “insides” that were exposed when they were split with drills.

“Gary, don’t you think that some of those edges are sticking out too far?” Abbot Denis asked during October as the stones began to arrive. “Don’t you have to make some modifications?”

“Let’s just wait until they are on top of each other,” Cunningham suggested.

The stones were assembled by a team of brick masons (unaccustomed to such large “bricks”) who used one-inch of a special Type-S mortar that matched the limestone’s load-bearing capacity. They would accomplish the job of laying the 427 stones in just two months, two months ahead of schedule.

“Wade was young and very focused,” Cunningham remembered. “We all struggled. We made it demanding. But Andres hired the right subs for the limestone and concrete work. They got it done for peanuts.”

The roof would be a different matter.

“There was a lot of collaboration with the glass guys and the wood guys,” Cunningham laughed. “We fought all the time.” One of the workers for the roof subcontractors confided to Abbot Denis, “Your architect is nuts.”

Of all the tricks in the church’s architecture, the roof steals the show by surprising visitors with the amount and array of “honest” lighting it creates, and how this light plays off the natural elements, especially the “insides” of the limestone walls.

While Romanesque architects found ingenious ways to bring light into their churches, Cunningham’s

roof design draws one’s eyes up in wonder.

“When I first walked in the completed church,” recalled Abbot Denis, “I felt as if the ceiling was about to float away. Then I looked again and I felt like it was about to fall on me.”

With just weeks to go before the consecration, craftsmen (including one of Cunningham’s former architects) cut and assembled the pews inside the church. They are made of Baltic birch imported from a location about 100 miles from Bélapátfalva.

On May 10, 1992, Thompson and Moroney (chairmen of the building committee) joined Cunningham and Andres to present the key of the building to Bishop Charles Grahmann and Abbot Denis.

The event, along with the names of the major donors, were commemorated with, appropriately enough, the slab of marble that had served as the altar from the old chapel inside the monastery. The text reads, “This church was built for the Cistercian Abbey and School by parents and students past and present under the leadership of the alumni.”

From the vantage point of the 20th anniversary of that day, the simple majesty of the Abbey Church has grown. The limestone blocks have aged and weathered, giving the structure the appearance of a church nearly as old as its medieval design. Inside, the church glows as brightly as that idea born in Colorado in 1990.

Thompson’s epiphany at Mass on New Year’s Day seemed important then. It was time to build a church to reward the monks who had sacrificed so much for the school. A church was needed to attract young men to the abbey so that the school could continue to be run by the Cistercians for decades to come.

Alumni would raise the money, an alumnus would design it, an alumnus would build it, and alumnus would say Mass in it.

Back in 1992, the chapel demonstrated to all the monks that the school had turned the corner. Their sacrifices had paid off. Debate in the abbey over the school’s value was now moot.

But with each passing year, the importance of the church seems to have grown as more and more baptisms, weddings, and funerals take place there.

Recently, of course, ordinations have become quite popular.



Twenty years later, the church continues to grow as a source of pride for (l-r) Gary Cunningham '72, Wade Andres '75, Jere Thompson '74, and Abbot Denis Farkasfakvy. It serves as a testament to the monks who founded the community and the monks who pray in it everyday.

The conviction and commitment of the men most directly responsible for funding, designing, and erecting this jewel are reflected nowadays in proud smiles.

“It was a rare alignment of the planets, providence,” said Cunningham about the church as he gathered with Abbot Denis, Thompson, and Andres for a photo. “You have to have a lot of things aligned for a project to turn out this well.”

“Jere’s plan was for the alumni to take a very active role in this project,” he added. “That helped align everything. His plan was not about ego, but about knowing that guys who went to Cistercian would have the ability, the relationship with the Cistercians, and the desire to do it right for their teachers and peers.”

“What other architect,” Thompson laughed, “would have traveled to Europe for six days with Fr. Denis?”

And from a longer view, the church testifies to the ideals, courage, and determination of the Cistercian Order, especially the monks from the Abbey of Zirc who were forced to flee their homeland to ensure the survival of their tradition.

The church will for centuries stand in tribute to the sacrifices they made and to the homeland they left behind.

Chapter 14

Mater Cistercium

“The first time I can remember knowing there was something wrong was when my dad began lifting my mom up the stairs,” Abbot Peter Verhalen ’73 reflected recently. Sometimes friends who came to visit would ask, “Where’s your mother?”

“She’s upstairs,” he would answer, “taking a nap.”

Bette Sue McKenzie Verhalen had been diagnosed with breast cancer at the birth of her second boy, Erik. In 1963, the family moved from Tulsa back to Dallas so that she could undergo chemotherapy at Baylor Hospital.

“The end was in sight at that point,” remembered Peter Verhalen Sr. “We began ordering our lives. We surrounded the boys with as much stability as possible. We were grateful that God let know we had six months left with her.”

They took trips down to the Stagecoach Inn in

Salado near Austin. Bette would sit by the pool as the boys swam.

Bette Verhalen had heard about a fledgling school called Cistercian from her sister-in-law Ruth Walters, whose son Chris Walters was attending. She liked what she heard. She hoped that he might attend in fourth grade.

“It was important for her,” said Verhalen Sr., “for Peter to be in that environment. The knowledge that he might enter Cistercian the following year was a real pleasure to her.”

Over the summer, Bette Verhalen attended one of Peter’s swim meets at the Dallas Country Club, sitting feebly on a chaise lounge in the shade as she watched.

“I remember Peter and Erik standing outside Bette’s hospital window at Baylor waving,” Verhalen Sr. recalled recently of the final days. “They wouldn’t let

children in hospital rooms in those days. Bette stood briefly at the window and waved back.”

On August 11, 1963, just weeks before her eight-year-old son Peter would begin his third-grade year at Holy Trinity, Bette Verhalen died.

“I remember Sister Joanna at Holy Trinity,” the abbot said. “She was known as very strict, but I was fond of her.”

“She asked about my mom, and I just burst out crying.”

“I don’t remember crying at the funeral,” the abbot said. “I remember people commenting about that.

“But I thought about how she was 33, the same age as Jesus when he died.”

Cistercian’s founding parents envisioned a school that would prepare their sons for the best colleges. They hoped the highly educated Cistercians, even with their thick accents, could provide a better Catholic education than their parochial schools. They believed that the monks would pass on morals and character. And they expected the monks to maintain discipline (even European-styled discipline).

But for Peter Verhalen entering Merici Hall in September 1964, Cistercian needed to be more. And somehow, it was.

Through the attention and leadership of his form master, Fr. John Vereb, Verhalen began to feel at home. He found priests whose stories resonated with him, stories of leaving behind their homeland, their families, and their mothers. And in Peter Verhalen, the monks found an American boy who was brilliant, studious, pious, and who was fighting through a loss more severe than theirs.

“I was in and out of town,” Verhalen Sr. recalled, “so people like Frances Hassell (Cistercian’s new school secretary that year and the only non-religious female on the staff) and Fr. John were very important. Sometimes, they saw more of him than me.”

In just his second year at Cistercian, Fr. John nominated Verhalen for the St. Bernard Gold Award, the

school’s highest honor. The faculty agreed, voting to give the award to the precocious First Former.

“Peter would come home from school, grab a glass of milk and hit the books or play piano,” said Verhalen Sr. “He recognized the value of capturing the time he had when he was clearheaded.” But he was not just a bookworm.

As a member of perhaps the most athletic class of the seventies, Verhalen won a reputation as a tough tackling defensive end in eighth-grade football. “I liked hitting, psyching up, and the emotion of the game,” the abbot recalled.

“Peter was one of the fiercest tacklers on the eighth-grade football team when I had the misfortune of being a second-string running back who was used primarily as a tackling dummy,” said Cullen Thomas ’73. “The coaches used to say Peter had a split personality because he was always so easygoing until he put on his helmet.” His affinity for sticking his head into ball carriers resulted in two separate pinched nerves in his neck his freshman year. He would have to turn to the less violent version of football, soccer.

Socially, he was a winner with the girls from the start.

“I remember Peter was voted the King of Hearts at the Junior Assembly Valentine’s Dance one year,” Thomas said. “That was quite an accomplishment considering Cistercian students’ limited exposure to the opposite sex in social situations back then. I was still terrified to ask girls to dance so it gave me a glimmer of hope for the future.

“At the time,” Thomas reflected, “I would have voted Peter the least likely person in our class to become a priest and myself the one most likely to become celibate.”

“Peter was extremely intelligent and well-liked,” recalled Gary Lucido ’73. “He was the only person in our class who could learn foreign languages. The rest of us concluded that the people of the world should just learn English.”

Teachers like Fr. Placid and Stephen Housewright encouraged Verhalen’s love for languages.

Housewright, who taught English at Cistercian



High school student Peter Verhalen with his cherished second mom, Hope.

from 1969 until 1978, inspired in many students a love for literature. He once wrote on the blackboard a sentence from the *Iliad* in Homer's Greek and then translated it word for word. Housewright explained to Verhalen and his classmates that Homer was trying to describe the same experience one would have in Vietnam (which was being fought at the time). The relevance of the passage and the ability to understand the writer's native language whetted Verhalen's intellectual appetite.

"I wanted to get out of Dallas, Texas, and America," recalled Fr. Peter in 2002, about his reasons for taking his junior year abroad. In Europe, he would study, travel, and soak up the culture. During school vacations — while his Austrian classmates vacationed with their families at home — Verhalen traveled alone around the continent. "I would spend a week or two hiking around, seeing a lot of places. It also was a chance to pray. I was thrown on to my own resources. I would come into a new city and I would end up in a church. It made me feel safe. I would pray, then leave, and follow the directions to the nearest youth hostel."

While his sense of independence and his reliance on prayer were growing, Verhalen's voracious mind was absorbing European life. Some of that life lay within the Cistercian monastery of Schlierbach where Verhalen boarded along with many of his classmates of the *gymnasium*, about 50 miles from Linz.

"I saw another side to the monks by staying in the monastery," Fr. Peter said. "The real influence was my

form master, Fr. Ludwig. The boys said he had a sad eye. There had been some severe illnesses in his family and his best friend had left the abbey. He was running the school because the headmaster was too old and tired to do so. He had all the responsibility but no authority. But he did his duty. He'd wake us up at 6:30 to send us off to a study hall every day. I admired his stability and his strength of will to live his vocation faithfully."

One night, Fr. Ludwig was sitting around in the lounge with Verhalen and his classmates. "He was predicting what each of us would become. When it was my turn, he said, 'You, Peter, will become a Cistercian.' I said no and laughed it off."

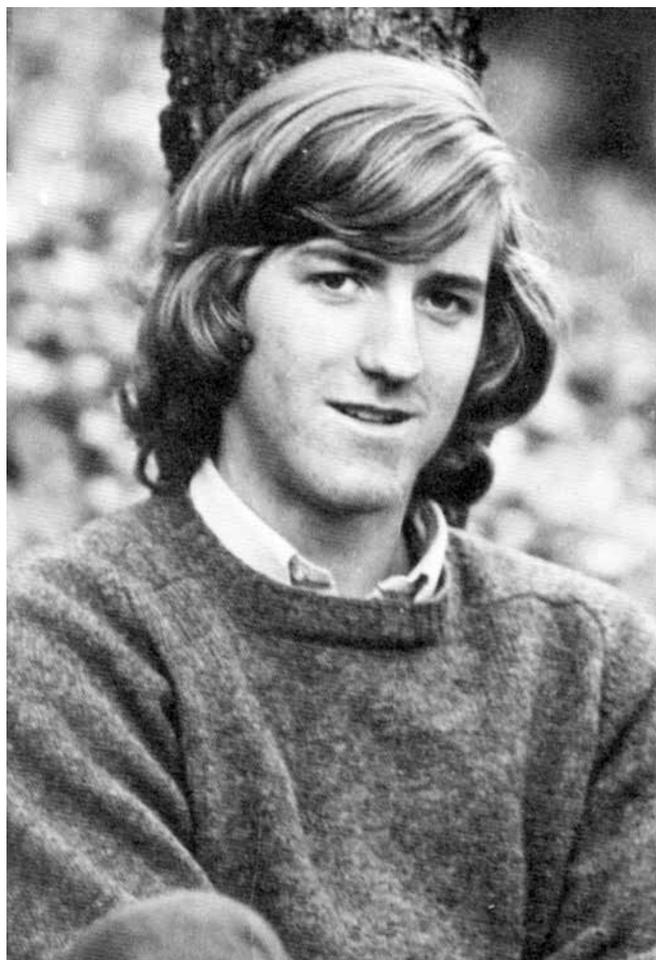
Then there was the matter of schoolwork.

Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, who had helped select the school and was old friends with Fr. Ludwig, told Verhalen he probably would last just a semester. After all, this school could not and would not make any allowances for an American. With just two years of German under his belt, it appeared optimistic to think he could survive their Form VII curriculum.

"I was really lucky with Fr. Placid at Cistercian," Fr. Peter insisted in 2002. "We teased him a lot but he was so talented. He prepared me so I was able to take all the classes at Schlierbach." Verhalen took all the courses his Austrian classmates were

required to take, except for Greek. The curriculum included Latin.

"The Latin at Schlierbach was a real eye-opener; it was so much more advanced than what I was used to. They were reading Virgil. We had to memorize page after page of vocabulary, one everyday. And it



The All-American kid — scholar, athlete, heartthrob — would return to the school and abbey that had served as a mother to him: "Challenging me to grow, forgiving my mistakes, tolerating my idiosyncrasies, and always providing the loving embrace and security that only a mother can offer her son."

was cumulative. It was a great way to learn German and Latin. I spent a lot of time with my Latin-German dictionary.”

Housewright had amazed him back in Texas by translating Homer’s Greek. Now he was learning to read the *Aeneid* in Virgil’s Latin. The challenge of learning Latin in German excited him.

Back in Irving, the September 1971 edition of *The Informer* made hay of Verhalen’s bold move to study in Austria. Verhalen wrote a letter to the paper that appeared in the October 1971 edition describing, among other things, one of Fr. Ludwig’s parties. “I went to a dance Friday night and it reminded me of something out of the early 1960s. There was a ‘play-like’ disc jockey and lots of ‘boys and girls.’ I really enjoyed it.”

Fr. Denis, who had expected Verhalen to be weary of it all by the end of the first semester, was receiving long, enthusiastic letters in German from the young American. Verhalen was proving to be up to the challenge and prepared for more.

By June, when Fr. Roch and Robert Salgo ’73 flew across the Atlantic to travel around with Verhalen at the end of his year at Schlierbach, the changes were clear. “The three of us were standing at the window of the Royal Castle [now a museum in Budapest],” remembered Fr. Roch. “We were looking down at the Danube. Half-joking, half-serious, Peter declared, ‘I don’t want to go back to America.’ He had developed a great love for Europe.”

And while the thought of the priesthood had occasionally entered his mind over the years, his year in Austria showed him the way. “I began to realize that God wanted me to do something else.”

Verhalen’s wavy blond locks were blowing in the wind on a gorgeous day in 1973. He and classmate Tom Lewis ’73 were headed out on the highway for their final senior class field trip in Verhalen’s 1956 Karmann Ghia convertible — a burnt red number that, despite a “tiny” engine, exuded a certain machismo.

Lewis was thinking life couldn’t get much better — field trip, sunny day, convertible — when his heart stopped. An eighteen-wheeler swung into their lane on Highway 114 forcing Verhalen to react quickly and swerve onto the shoulder. As the truck sped by, the blood rushed from Lewis’ face and he looked at Verhalen wide-eyed.

Exhilarated, Verhalen glanced at Lewis and smiled. “I think,” he bellowed over the noise of the car and wind, “he was trying to run us off the road.”

He was the same old Verhalen in most respects, but something had changed.

“There were subtle differences in Peter when he came back from Austria,” said Lewis, who served as president of the student government their senior year.

“Nothing earth shattering. He was just more mature; he had a quiet confidence that grew out of his experiences in Europe. He had developed an international perspective on things and he seemed to have a feeling of how his own future was going to fit into that bigger picture.”

After school, Verhalen worked at various jobs, from landscaping with Joe Martin ’73 to serving ice cream at Ashburn’s and at Swenson’s on Oak Lawn with Eugene Johnson ’73, Billy Hassell ’74, and David Martin ’74.

In the fall of 1973, Verhalen and good friend Eugene Johnson headed off to Bowdoin College in Maine where he studied classics and tended bar at the inn where Harriett Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

“He began to hint at a priestly vocation in his long letters written in fancy, complicated German during his freshman year,” recalled Fr. Roch. “He would always write about serious matters in German before his decision to enter the monastery. But while at Bowdoin, he warned me not to take him too seriously since he even had a girl friend.”

But it was serious. During the spring of his freshman year, Verhalen decided to take a leave of absence in the fall. After tending bar for a couple of months, he headed to Colorado with a Bowdoin classmate who had never been west of Maine. Their plan was to ski during the day and to tend bar at night. But Verhalen had something



“When I am alone hiking, it’s like a retreat,” Fr. Peter said. “It’s frequently just praying, enjoying nature, and meditating.”

else on his mind.

When they found bartending jobs weren't so easy to come by, the pair decided to part ways in Crested Butte for a few days. His buddy headed to Steamboat Springs to check out the job market; Verhalen was going hiking. They agreed to meet up in Aspen in a couple of days.

"When I am alone hiking, it's like a retreat," Fr. Peter said. "It's frequently just praying, enjoying nature, and meditating." This hike in the first days of September 1974 would give Verhalen plenty of time to reflect on finding his way in life because within three hours of leaving balmy Crested Butte, he lost the trail.

Verhalen had set out in shorts with a little dehydrated food and a quart of water. He was counting on continued good weather, an easy-to-follow trail, and a 24-hour hike. But the weather deteriorated quickly. The season's first snow moved in and obscured the trail. This 24-hour hike would take Verhalen over four days before it finally landed him in Aspen and in the priesthood.

"Hiking is such an important element in his life," said Matthew Nevitt '97, a class for which Fr. Peter served as form master. "It makes him the guy he is. He always used hiking as a metaphor when he taught us. Every summer, he would take a hiking trip and return with captivating tales.

"He would tell us stories about being above the treeline with lightning all around him. It fascinated all of us. So when he offered to take us on a hike after seventh grade, nearly the whole class signed up. Since he could take only about twenty, we drew numbers to see who would go. (The remaining

students were taken the following summer.)

"It was an incredible trip. Fr. Peter told us what to take in our backpacks and divvied up the food. We drove out to Wheeler Peak, the highest peak in New Mexico. We hiked up near the snow and caught lots of trout. After we climbed to the summit, we all slid down the steep snow bank, like we were skiing on our feet. I expected him to tell us that it was too dangerous, but he didn't mind. We came sliding down, instead of taking the path. We'll never forget it."

Back in September 1974, Verhalen found more time for reflection than merriment.

"The first night I couldn't find a creek so I was afraid to drink my quart of water or eat my dehydrated food," recalled Fr. Peter in 2002. "It was cold. Coyotes surrounded me. I held on to my Swiss Army knife; I was scared, hungry, and lost."

During the course of the hike, he heard the call. "That little voice said, 'You need to stop all this searching and join the monastery and teach kids.'

"A day later I met up with two guys and a girl who also were lost and hungry," Fr. Peter said. "One of the guys was completely unprepared for the weather and was so scared and starved that he had lost all composure. He was weeping uncontrollably; he was certain he was going to die on the mountain."

Fortunately, Verhalen and the girl kept their cool, studied their maps, and helped the group find the trail and their way down. The life-threatening situation bonded the four. When they arrived in Aspen, they met up with Verhalen's buddy and had a great party to celebrate the hikers' survival.

His buddy still hadn't found a job. Verhalen had.



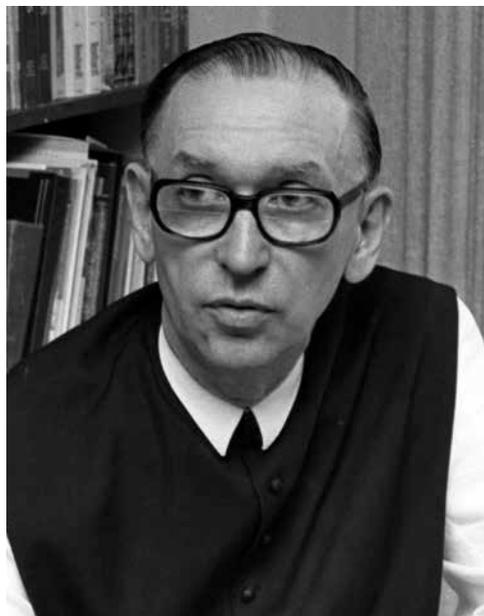
(Above) Br. Peter with Fr. Roch Kereszty (left) and novice-mate Br. Gregory Schweers in 1975.
(Below) Fr. Peter leading students from the school to the abbey for mass.

the survival of the monastic community.”

“The time seemed ripe,” Fr. Louis wrote of the early sixties in his 1967 account, *Hungarian Cistercians in America*, “for the organization of a secondary school enabling the Order to resume and continue its traditional educational role.

“Plans,” he wrote, “called for the creation of something similar to the old *gymnasium* in Hungary, i.e., a college preparatory school for boys, to be known as Cistercian Preparatory School, with an eight-year liberal arts curriculum.

“The project was [encouraged] by the fact that it offered a much needed choice for parents of talented children and,” he emphasized, “the successful operation of the institution presented the best chance to foster vocations and thus



(Above) Fr. Louis Lékai, the community’s visionary founder, understood the significance of the school’s becoming a source for vocations. (Below) Fr. Peter with his form master, Fr. Roch.

Abbot Anselm expressed a subtler version on this thinking in the 1973 *Exodus*, as he reflected on the school’s first ten years. “What will our school become within the next 10 years?” Abbot Anselm asked rhetorically in his letter to the readers of the yearbook. “It depends on its administration, teaching staff, the enthusiasm of the parents and, above all, on the young men who graduate from our school.”

Like many of the Hungarians in the monastery, Fr. Louis and Abbot Anselm graduated from St. Emeric’s Cistercian school in Budapest (as had many of the Hungarian monks in Dallas). Most of the teachers at St. Emeric’s were Cistercian monks, and many had graduated from one of the five Cistercian’s schools in Hungary.





Abbot Peter receives a blessing from Fr. Mauro Giuseppe Lepori, the abbot general of the Cistercian Order.

Peter Verhalen's arrival in the monastery signaled the first the step in creating that kind of cycle in America. But Br. Peter wasn't just any alumnus. Like his Hungarian counterparts, he was a lover the classics, languages, and all things European. He had known the Cistercians as a student; now he would absorb their wisdom as a monk. The significance of this vocation — an All-American kid committing his life to being a monk, teacher, and priest — would ripple through generations to come.

Somehow, the small Cistercian school community in the sixties had given Peter Verhalen the emotional support he needed. His return would help the Hungarians fulfill their mission of carrying on the traditions of Zirc in America. Eventually, as he built on the work of his predecessors, Fr. Peter would elevate every aspect of the school, creating an institution that would attract increasingly talented students and teachers. Beginning in 2002, some of those great new teachers also happened to be young monks.

Not long after Fr. Peter's ordination in August 1981 and the beginning of his career as a teacher and form master, Fr. Louis suffered a stroke. Partially paralyzed

and debilitated, he lost his cherished ability to speak (he had forbidden Hungarian to be spoken at the monastery's dinner table so the monks would practice their English) and to write.

He would, however, remain lucid, living in the Laboure nursing home next St. Paul's Hospital. Fr. Peter visited him regularly. How Fr. Louis must have wished he could have shared his feelings with the young American who was playing a pivotal role in seeing his vision through.

"I really think his humor and his outlook became more and more positive as he became weaker and weaker and suffered more and more," Fr. Peter said.

Only July 1, 1994, within two years of Fr. Peter's appointment as headmaster, Fr. Louis died. The traditions of Zirc, he must have known, were in good hands.

"Fr. Denis was in Hungary," Abbot Peter remembered recently, "So it was left to me, as prior, to bury him. It was a blessing since I loved Fr. Louis. He had taught me in the prep school.

"While I had a mountain of work to do — preparing a homily, dealing with the details of

obituaries, memorials, and welcoming guests — I couldn't neglect Fr. Louis' nephew from California. We sat at Starbucks on the day of the funeral; he needed consoling."

His counseling made a difference.

A few years before, he worked to help Alex Lopez '89, a member of his Class of '89, to cope with the death of his brother, George.

"I didn't have role in the funeral," Abbot Peter remembered, "but I talked to counselors for advice on how to help Alex. I read about it and I began to form my own opinions about helping individuals facing death or the death of a loved one."

Sadly, Fr. Peter would have more than his share of opportunities to put his talents to use. As a form master and as the headmaster at the school, Fr. Peter found himself counseling more and more. All the while, his gift was drawing the ever-growing community closer together.

Fr. Peter was sharing the experience that he, his brother, and his dad had needed so much back in 1964.

"We needed to accept everything that came down the pike," said Verhalen Sr. recently of his grieving young family in 1964. "We may not have understood it, but God did and we had to accept it and make the most of the rest of our lives."

Inside the Abbey Church on April 12, 2012, an indescribable spirit radiated among the community gathered for the benediction of Abbot Peter Verhalen. The pews were jam-packed with as many people as

emotions — the optimism of a baptism, the intimacy of a family gathering, the pride of a commencement, the hope of a wedding, the solemnity of a funeral, and the jubilation of an ordination.

The lighting in the church, governed by the clouds above, seemed to dim and brighten on cue. The church's ancient beauty felt as if it had been constructed for just this occasion. Alumni, students, parents, friends, breathed as one. The school and the abbey became one. The Hungarians and Americans were one.



Abbot Peter's remarks to the community were brief, just seven minutes. But they left a lasting impression.

"I had watched the video of Fr. Denis' 1988 benediction," Abbot Peter said a few weeks after ceremony. "Seeing how far we've come, with a community now that is twice the size with so many more alumni, there were a lot of good feelings."

"I was proud and grateful to be surrounded by a loving community. I wasn't anxious," the abbot said. "It has already been proven that when I need help, there is a host of people I can turn to. It was as if I was the son coming into his own, ready to take care of his family."

Many of the abbot's classmates from the Class of '73 attended, along with members of his three forms (Classes of '89, '97, and '03), and hundreds from the community at large. Out in front of the church still more sat

beneath a large tent and watched the ceremony on a monitor.

Four bishops represented the Dallas and Fort Worth dioceses at the ceremony. Cistercian abbots came from Rome, Zirc, and Canada; two Cistercians attended from California and a Cistercian novice-mistress traveled from Wisconsin.

Of course, his family turned out, led by his father and his beloved second mom, Hope Verhalen, to whom — after a date in high school — he had shared his desire to become a priest.

Up until this point, Abbot Peter had contained himself. But in introducing his family and his *confreres* in the abbey, he began to show and share his feelings, at ease before his community.

“When I first came to Cistercian as a fourth grader 48 years ago,” he reflected, “I realized at that time that Cistercian was in a sense a real mother for me.

“Cistercian was a mother challenging me to grow, forgiving my mistakes, tolerating my idiosyncrasies, and always providing the loving embrace and security that only a mother can offer her son.”

In the interest of brevity, Abbot Peter mentioned only a few of the many special people who supported him through the years: Fr. Roch Kereszty, (his form master, novice master, and theology teacher, and friend), Fr. Gregory Schweers (his novice mate), and the founders of

“I was proud and grateful to be surrounded by a loving community,” Abbot Peter said of the ceremonies (below).

the monastery, Abbot Anselm and Fr. Louis.

“[The founders were],” he said, “members of the earlier generation that bore the heat of the Texas summer day, in bearing life, Cistercian life, here in Dallas.”

“And finally I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Abbot Denis,” he added, containing his emotions.

“He was my Algebra II teacher, my headmaster when I graduated, and then for 24 years, he was my abbot, my friend, and frankly the inspiration for me as I strove to understand our vocation to live more like Christ here in Dallas as monks, teachers, and priests.

“The early Cistercian monks referred to their monastery as *Mater Cistercium*,” he said, “our mother Cistercian.

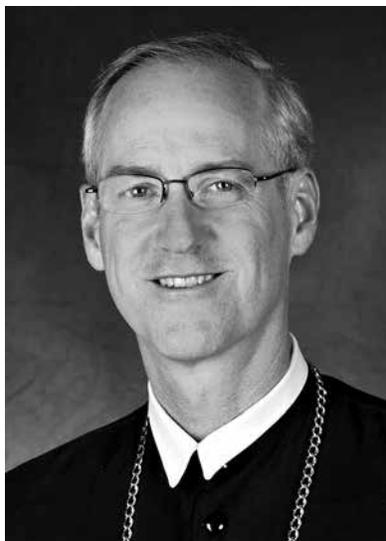
“Please continue to pray, to pray for me and our community that Cistercian can, like a mother, challenge and forgive and support all of us in our efforts to follow Christ more closely. Thank you.”

He returned to his seat next to the bishop. As he sat, the community rose, jubilant and proud.

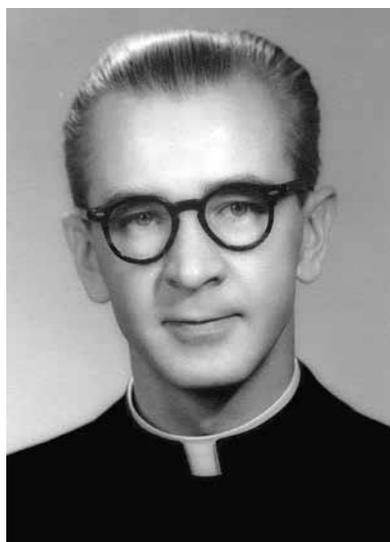
He shed his glasses and wiped a tear, for his mother.



Abbots
OUR LADY OF DALLAS
CISTERCIAN ABBEY
1963 - 2012



Abbot Peter Verhalen,
2012 -



Abbot Anselm Nagy,
1963 - 1988
(b. 1915, d. 1988)



Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy,
1988 - 2012



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