THE UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

Spiritual Riches:  
A Brief History of UD's Religious Life
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From its inception the University of Dallas has provided a rich reservoir of spiritual resources for its community. The long traditions of Cistercian monks and Dominican Friars and the rich histories of service of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur and School Sisters of Notre Dame combined with the committed lives of the priests of the Dioceses of North Texas furnished a vibrant mix of insights into the religious life of the Church. The burgeoning lay population of the region provided an energizing, pioneering background for the development of spiritual life at the University. The University motto—love truth and justice—continues to permeate both the intellectual and religious life of the institution.

When the University of Dallas opened in 1956 Father Damian Szodenyi, one of the nine Cistercian monks who were part of the initial faculty of the University, served as both first Dean of Men and the first Chaplain. He arranged for daily and Sunday Mass in the little chapel on the West side of campus which came to be called St. Thomas Aquinas Chapel. Father Damian, also to become an accomplished sculptor, was followed by a series of one to two year appointments of other Cistercians, Diocesan priests and Dominicans—most had other duties, administrative or professorial, at the University.

That first school year began with the Mass of the Holy Spirit. While daily Mass was said in the small chapel, as early as 1965 weekend and special liturgies often were held in Lynch Auditorium. Adding to the space crunch, in 1965 Bishop Thomas K. Gorman, founding Bishop of the University, established the only four year collegiate seminary in Texas at the University. For the first two years, while its building was under construction, the seminary was housed in Jerome Hall. With the assistance of Father Gerald Hughes, Msgr Edward R. Maher, vice-president of the University, served as Seminary Rector from 1965-1968.
In order to enhance the pedestrian cement block Thomas Aquinas Chapel, renovations to it began in 1965 under Chaplain and later Dean of Men Rev. Milam J. Joseph. Over the next decade, through the talents of Professor of Art Lyle Novinski, new lighting, liturgical furniture and wall coverings with colored fenestration provided a more sacred atmosphere to the small chapel. Carpet and chairs, replacing the space-limiting pews, were added. In addition, suitable liturgical furniture and wall-hangings were provided for the now-regular Sunday liturgies in Lynch Auditorium.

Significant to the necessary use of temporary spaces for large liturgies was the development of the Advent Mass which grew out of Advent in Art coordinated by the Art Department. For many years the four Sundays of Advent were celebrated in Maher Athletic Center at 5pm. The gym atmosphere was transformed into a sacred space each Advent weekend through the design of Professor Novinski and the labors of the Faith Community. Because of their beauty, these special liturgies attracted many visitors from the area who then became regular participants. Advent Masses continued until the Chapel of the Incarnation opened in 1985.

Public Oratory Established

By the early 70s both the University and the surrounding area had grown substantially. There were now two Catholic parishes in Irving but none adjacent to the Las Colinas development. The small chapels at the Cistercian and Dominican houses provided some worship opportunity but more and more visitors began to seek religious services at the University. The late beloved Damian Fandal, O.P., of the Philosophy and Theology faculty, who was the first Dean of the Braniff Graduate School (1966-1972) and Academic Dean (1973-77), also served as chaplain from 1971-1973. He understood the urgent need for more focus on the religious life of the University and he possessed the pastoral and personal talents to attract parishioners.

With the enthusiastic approval of Donald Cowan, President, 1962-1977, Father Fandal petitioned Bishop Thomas Tschoepe for fuller recognition of the important task. On May
29, 1973 the Bishop established a Public Oratory at the University, the canonical designation for a non-territorial parish, that is, a church whose primary responsibility is for a specific community or group of people, in this case, the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of the University and those who choose it as their spiritual home. (In 2001 the Diocese changed the designation to Church of the Incarnation further emphasizing its status as an institutional church dedicated to a specific group rather than a geographical territory.)

A permanent full-time chaplain was required. At the request of Dr. Cowan, Bishop Tschoepe assigned a young diocesan priest, Donald L. Fischer, to the University. Father Fischer, who had been an art major at UD for two years before attending seminary, began his thirteen year chaplaincy in fall of 1973. Father Fischer brought with him an enthusiastic following from his previous assignments. A strong, involved Faith Community began to be established through his liturgical sense and tireless response to community needs. The Faith Community supported the religious life of the students and the work of the Oratory through activities such as Family Day of Charity Week, liturgical needs, Catholic Community Appeal, Advent Masses and generous contributions.

**Church of Incarnation Realized**

Now weekend liturgies were regularly held in Lynch Auditorium and were full to overflowing. By 1983 long-term dreams and plans for an adequate campus church began to come to fruition. A capital campaign led by Robert F. Sasseen, President 1981-1995, sought funds to build the long-awaited Patrick Haggerty Science Building. Because of the growth of the Faith Community under Father Fischer, a campus church was added to the fund-raising effort. The dreams of a permanent chapel for the University were realized in the exquisitely crafted Chapel of the Incarnation. It was dedicated on March 24, 1985, the feast of the Annunciation.

Father Fischer’s long tenure and taste was essential to the accomplishment as was the generosity of the Faith Community, Trustees and other donors. Beasley, Neuhoff,
Thompson, Maurice and Fred Korkmas, Vilfordi were some who were extraordinarily generous in time and funds. Msgr Fischer remembers the afternoon in his Chaplain office when they were still short of monies to begin construction. Claiborne Johnson and Eugene Vilfordi got on the phone to prospective donors and gathered in the needed monies. He described this as typical of the generosity and dedication which built the church. Often, as he prayed in preparation for a liturgy, someone would come up and give him a check for the building.

Jane Landry was the principal architect for the award-winning chapel which, while clearly a 20th Century structure, recalls both Medieval and Romanesque architectural traditions. It also reflects details, such as the floor bricks and style of pillars, of other campus buildings designed by the late famed architect O’Neil Ford.

Isaac Maxwell’s San Antonio firm fabricated the copper candlesticks, planters, and chandeliers. Lyle Novinski served as liturgical consultant and designed the liturgical appointments including the altar and baptismal font. The late Heri Bert Bartscht, Professor of Art, sculpted the Stations of the Cross, the Crucifix adorning the chancel, and the Michael the Archangel statue guarding the main entrance, a gift of Donald and Louise Cowan. Professor of Art, Juergen Strunck, created the glorious cross for the Easter season. For the Advent and Christmas seasons, Michelle Redwanz Eliseo ’90 provided Walking Figure, a reflection on the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word who becomes flesh and who shines as light in the darkness. A Lenten leather work of a penitent with arms held out in a gesture of receptivity to the grace of forgiveness is by Novinski. The Guadalupe in the Thomas Aquinas Eucharistic Chapel, a place for calm reflection, is a gift from the parents of Mark Smith, a student who died in 1982. Christ as Lightgiver, an icon, is a gift from the Anglican community which for many years met monthly on the UD campus. The Madonna and Child sculpture is by Barbara Curtsinger. Recently added for Ordinary Time is The Transfiguration painting by Professor Novinski. Through the generosity of the Faith Community and other donors, an exact copy of it in mosaic, the dominant media of sacred art in the Eternal City, has been
installed in the Chapel of the Transfiguration on the Rome Campus. It was crafted by award-winning mosaist, Julie Groschen Richey, '87.

**Further Development**

Growth in the University and Faith Community necessitated larger staff—secretary, campus ministers, assistants. The permanent structure required regular maintenance and sacristans as more and more people asked for sacraments to be performed in the beautiful church. And the contributions of the Faith Community provided these services.

Thus, from a chaplain who was usually a faculty member to a full-time chaplain, secretary and student workers, the staff expanded to the present day arrangement which includes Campus Ministry Staff, Music Ministry, Sacristans. The Faith Community started long-running activities such as the bible-study program, Didache. Retreats and Days of Recollection were held for students and the Faith Community. RCIA thrives. Student volunteer efforts have grown beyond the fund-raising of Charity Week to working at soup kitchens, University for Dallas, and Alternative Spring Break trips. In short, virtually all the activities and expectations of a normal parish have become part of the life of the Church of the Incarnation.

Once the Chapel was completed the need for sorting out the financial and administrative responsibilities of the parish and those of the University became apparent. Because Father Fischer was appointed pastor of St. Bernard’s Parish shortly after completion of the Chapel, this task fell primarily to Father Gregory Kelly, ‘78 and ‘82, who served as University Chaplain from 1985-1996.

The Campus Ministry Staff had grown gradually to respond to the needs of both student and lay community. The Faith Community assumed responsibility for its support as well as most of the general maintenance and liturgical needs of the church. At many Catholic colleges the Campus Ministry/Pastoral staff is supported by the institution especially since the issuance of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* by John Paul II in 1990 which required Catholic institutions to provide a Campus Ministry Staff.
During the development of the Church building Father Fischer involved students, faculty and lay parishioners in consideration of the site, design, fundraising, naming and so forth. Others served on the Parish Finance Committee. As Father Kelly began to organize a parish structure he also used advisory groups such as the Ad Hoc Committee for the Council on Campus Ministry. Members were selected to represent different constituencies—students, faculty, parishioners, ministry staff were chosen because of their knowledge of the community and participation in its life and prayer. This committee met four times that Spring of 1991 to determine its responsibilities, membership and a mission statement for the chaplain’s office in keeping with the mission of the University. The first meeting of the Campus Ministry Advisors was held September 3, 1991. Advisory committees change over the years depending on the interests and needs of the parish and its leadership.

Of course, the Parish Finance Committee continued to meet. Its 1993 members included: Faculty/Staff: Father Kelly, Christine Edmonds, Kimberly Thomes, James Reid, Bernard Ricca, Sybil Novinski; Faith Community: Helen Schilling, Margie Cruse, Peggy Bailey, Dina Feil, Stephen Lawrence. Helen Schilling continues to serve.

Father Kelly’s 1994 Financial Report stated that the Parish had contributed $158,562 toward parish expenses including salary for an assistant chaplain, general maintenance, chapel utilities, landscaping, mass stipends, sextons, musician salaries and so forth. It outlined specifically what the University provided and the responsibilities of the Parish.

Present arrangements are that The University funds the salary of the chaplain, covers utilities and general maintenance of the building and also any “major” maintenance requirements. All other costs for the Campus Ministry Staff and its programs, activities of the parish, special needs are funded by the Faith Community.

The Faith Community developed by the long tenures of Msgr. Fischer and Father Kelly provided the church structure, supported its activities along with Campus Ministry and
continues to respond to calls for special needs including $45,000 to establish a Religious Life Facility in Anselm Hall and $100,000 to create a chapel space and its appointments for the new Rome Campus which opened in 1994. It regularly exceeds the goal for the Diocesan Assessment for the Catholic Community Appeal and any other collections.

Parish Traditions

Over the years certain traditions have developed for the Church of the Incarnation which are engendered by the quality of the sacred space, the commitment of the lay community and the aims of the University. Original art and live plants are required because they reflect the honesty and truth of the sacred space. The art pieces at the Baptismal Font reflect the liturgical seasons. Banners, simple strips of cloth, indicate the seasons in the Eucharistic space. A worship aid is printed for each Sunday liturgy. Another important tradition is the installation of bronze markers remembering students who died while at the institution and faculty and staff while in service at UD.

The generosity of the Faith Community provides the salaries for Campus Ministry staff; it also supports special traditions such as “Donut Sunday”, the first Sunday of every month, and the beautiful flowers, such as Easter Lillies, that appear at appropriate times of the year. And for twenty-five years Didache has attracted parishioners and students to community scripture study after the 9am Sunday Mass.

Openness to discussion of various emphases in the Church has also been part of the tradition over the past 50 plus years. Besides the intensity of a dedicated faculty and staff representing different points of view, the devout student body comes from all parts of the United States and the world and brings with it a variety of understandings of Church teachings and liturgical practices. A continual educational process reminds the Faith Community that, while remaining open to the good influences from everywhere, it must represent the mind and needs of both the local and the universal Church.
Chaplains of the University

Diocesan priests have held the position of University Chaplain the majority of the time. Clearly, two long-term Diocesan priests, Fischer and Kelly, are principally responsible for setting the tone and traditions of the Church of the Incarnation. However, in addition to the Chaplain and Campus Ministry Staff, religious life continues to be enriched by the Cistercian, Dominican and Seminary priests available to assist with providing Eucharist, Sacraments, and spiritual direction. In the years since the completion of the Chapel of the Incarnation, both the Cistercians and Dominicans have completed new worship spaces. While the Church of the Incarnation is the center of their liturgical life, these sites provide additional opportunities for the students.

Chaplains

Rev. Damian Szodenyi, O. Cist. 1956-1957
Rev. Ernest Farnand, O.F.M. 1957-1958
Rev. Milam Joseph 1965-1966
Rev. William Moran 1966-1967
Rev. Damian Fandal, O.P. 1971-1973
Rev. Donald Fischer 1973-1986
Denise Phillips, Dir Liturgy and Catechesis 1995-1996
Msgr. John Bell 1999-2001
Msgr. Milam Joseph 2003-2004
Rev. Rudy Garcia 2009-2010
Rev. Donald Dvorak, O.P. 2010-
Campus Ministry Staff—2009-2013

The Campus Ministry Staff is directed by Denise Phillips. Carol Norris serves as Director of Music Ministry; Tameko Mays as Administrative Assistant; Dihan Fernando as chief Sexton. Additional Campus Ministry Staff and Faith Community members, such as Deacon Larry Harmon, lector Antoinette Barilla, wedding arranger Mike Weber, and catechist, Terry Quinn are integral to the life of the Church of the Incarnation.

The staff responds to the spiritual needs and requests of the student body, Catholic and non-Catholic, with insight and vigor. It provides counseling and spiritual comfort, arranges Retreats and RCIA, schedules celebrants and trains Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers, encourages Eucharistic Adoration, Rosary, Night Prayer, and volunteer work such as serving at soup kitchens or working with the poor during Alternative Spring Break. Over the 2008 Spring Break the student pilgrims, accompanied by Father Powell, served at the Oasis Catolico de Santa Rafaela in Athens, Georgia. Students raised the funds to participate primarily through the generosity of the Faith Community.

One of the most popular programs is the weekly Dinner and Discourse at which attendees eat dinner, prepared by students, in the AnselM Ministry Center and hear a short talk on a wide range of subjects from the latest writings of important theologians to various liturgical rites of the Church to the history of religious orders visiting campus. Crocheting items for prospective mothers, bible study, and special prayer groups are typical of activities encouraged and sponsored by the Campus Ministry Office.

Music Ministry

The Chapel of the Incarnation is known for the quality of its liturgical music. Under the enlightened direction of Carol Norris for over thirty years, and accompanied by the exceptional musicality of pianist Bob Hurley, the Music Ministry has enlarged its repertoire, developed choral and instrumental music, and is respected for its prayerful response to the scripture of the day and season. Important gifts have made this program possible especially that of the Dunlap Memorial Artists Fund given by the late former Board member, Peggy Thompson, in memory of her father Hugh Dunlap. Donated in
1986, just after the opening of the church, for ten years the fund allowed the Music Ministry to bring in professional musicians to enhance weekend liturgies. Others, such as Margie and Dan Cruse, regularly provide additional funds. A core of musicians such as the Shea Family (mother flautist, sons cellist and violinist) greatly enhances the liturgies; others are employed to augment major festival liturgies.

**Holy Trinity Seminary**

Holy Trinity Seminary, established by Bishop Thomas K. Gorman in 1965, used Jerome Hall at the University until the Seminary building and chapel were dedicated in November 11, 1967; its chapel was renovated in 2005-2006. From 1967-1986 HTS also included the Theologate, that is, it was an eight-year seminary. Ordinations were conducted in the seminary chapel. Bachelors and Master of Divinity degrees were earned from the University of Dallas. A majority of the priests presently serving the Diocese were trained at Holy Trinity.

In Fall 1986 the Theologate was consolidated in Houston and Holy Trinity became the undergraduate seminary for Texas. In fact, HTS forms seminarians for dioceses throughout the United States and Mexico. Currently there are over 70 seminarians studying at Holy Trinity. In addition, the Cistercian Abbey has attracted over a dozen new monks many of whom are UD graduates. The Dominican Priory has been designated the novice house for the Order’s Southern Province.

**Rectors of the Seminary**

Rev. Charles King 1968-1969
Rev. Charles W. Elmer 1982-1987
Rev. Michael G. Duca 1996-2008
Rev. Mark Olson 2008-
Church of the Incarnation Statistics

Estimates and Averages  2008-2009

Average Sunday Mass Attendance: 1525
Average Sunday Collection: $7000
Number of Masses Offered during Academic Year: 10 weekly, four weekends
Student attendance, weekdays, 175-225
Student Attendance, weekends, 550
Weddings per year, 25-30
Baptisms per year, 35-40
Funerals, 5
RCIA, 10

Summary

The University of Dallas student benefits not only from an exceptional academic experience but from an unusually rich spiritual milieu. The generous hospitality of the lay community and the constant teaching of the Campus Ministry/Pastoral Staff combine with the vibrant traditions which feed it to provide both a special campus religious environment and a solid look at a complete parish life. Many vocations have come from the University over the years. 22 Religious Orders sent representatives to the 2013 Vocations Fair. At least eight UD alums have been named Bishops. Just as important, and as attested to by the many alumni who visit the parish when they are in Dallas, the Church of the Incarnation and the University has fostered thousands of active and committed Catholic leaders.

October 2013, Sybil Novinski, University Historian