Chapter 6

Learning with Imagination: Iraqi Style

"The world is charged with the Grandeur of God!"
Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. (1844-1889)

Summary: 37 years of Baghdad College programs

There was a wide variety of interests among the faculty as well as the student body which was evident in the Baghdad College programs. There were scholarly projects such as the science, the debating and the elocution clubs. The English language labs opened the door for continuing education of the city's many English teachers. The spiritual programs included service to the poor, the Apostolate of Prayer, the annual Novenas of Grace and Sodalities who were especially zealous in Catechetical work and religious celebrations, for example, the unique event called "Petroleum Sunday". A much needed Christian Center was founded for Baghdad's youth and the Minor Seminary was entrusted to the Jesuits at Sulaikh. Ever present were Iraqi laity like Iraq's saintly Sit Ameana (introduced later in this chapter) who inspired both students as well as Jesuits.

Among the social programs, Parents' Day and June graduations ranked rather high. Other social events which were less organized included Jesuit visits to wakes and to Christian and Muslim families during their feasts. There were also efforts to form a caring community so that the lay faculty would not feel left out of things. The athletic programs were probably the most organized and predictable of all the Baghdad College events.

The Jesuits spent much of their time planning for the future
and were called upon to investigate plans for other educational efforts in the Middle East. Busy as the men were there had always been the emphasis on Jesuit scholarship. There was an increase in momentum for planned improvements and new programs in the last decade since there were more Jesuits and therefore more time to consider questions and problems which arose during this engrossing era. Like the annual rings of a tree, the growth stages of Baghdad College were marked starting with the small school in cramped, rented quarters off Rashid Street to the 25 acre beautiful, well-kept, suburban campus with many striking buildings in Sulai kh, but the growth was measured by more than increased enrollments and the buildings. To the remarkable material progress of Baghdad College must be added the numerous activities, athletic and scholastic that have been included in the school program as guides for the varied interests of the ever-expanding student body.

1957 assembly of the whole student body
Academic programs

Of prime importance in any Jesuit school is the intellectual life. The first President of any Jesuit university was Peter Canisius, S.J. (who was later canonized). He had been elected President of the University of Ingolstadt, Germany in 1550 and St. Ignatius told him to accept the position. He founded 18 colleges in as many cities with strong emphasis on academic excellence, insisting: "better a college without a chapel than a college without a library." His intellectual spirit was emulated at Baghdad College which could also boast of a superb chapel.

The Scientific Society

The Scientific Society met each week during the school year. Lectures were delivered by members of the science faculty and by students, and one meeting each month was devoted to the discussion of business affairs and guest speakers frequently from Baghdad University. Projects such as weather observation, mapping sun spots, geological surveying, semi-conductors as a source of energy and short films on astronomy, biology, chemistry, radio and television. During the year the members of the Society enjoyed several holiday picnics. A small bulletin was issued at regular intervals to the student body concerning these topics.

On the campus it was one of the most popular societies numbering about 40 students who had maintained an average above 75 in the sciences. The purpose of such a Society was (a) to increase knowledge and to foster interest in science, (b) to bring to the attention of those interested recent developments in scientific fields, and (c) to offer to the individual members of the Society an opportunity to express their own thoughts on scientific subjects by delivering papers written by themselves. There were four officers: president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. All meetings were held in one of Fr. Guay's beautifully designed sloped classrooms "S-28" located in the Rice Science building.

Fairfield University donation: a Newtonian reflector telescope
Baghdad's first TV science program

Television came to Baghdad earlier than most countries (in 1956) and the early programming relied on old American movies. In an effort to diversify, the station directors asked Fr. Sullivan for some ideas. Fr. MacDonnell of the physics department was invited to present the first science program on Iraqi TV in 1957. It was an hour long program of physics demonstrations and the school had recently acquired some wonderful equipment. Fr. MacDonnell got together five senior students who would not get rattled and who understood and could explain the physics principles involved.

The Baghdad television tower was visible from a generous distance, but finding an entrance to the barn-like studio in the unpretentious surroundings of Karkh (a section of Baghdad across the Tigris River from Baghdad College) presented a difficult challenge. A dust storm was threatening when a troupe of five B.C. seniors, eager to display their lab technique, arrived for their hour long program in which they would demonstrate the principles of electrostatics. Inside the studio was an air of great mobility which was to be the keynote of the evenings performance; curtain backdrops were being rolled and unrolled for the best effect, three new 'Pye' TV cameras were being maneuvered about with great abandon, while carpenters were carefully nailing planks to saw-horses to provide a demonstration table.

Fr. McCarthy describes the Tesla coil
Baghdad College's physics experiments made up the first item on the evening program of "Telifizion al Baghdad". Sameer Busha asked for a ground wire to protect both the equipment and the studio, but the electrician insisted that there was 'mu ground' (no ground wire) - which only meant that this merited more discussion than a simple request. All hands in the studio proved to be a very amiable lot to work with, especially the camera crew, who reflected the degree of enthusiasm and interest expected of the TV audience.

The Wimshurst machine discharging sparks or lighting neon tubes had its own fascination, but when Nabeel Khurdachi used it as a source of charge to make the "dolls" of pith dance between aluminum plates, it provided so much activity, camera #1 was reluctant to leave it for a demonstration so prosaic as charging an electroscope. "Electrostatic wind" returned motion to the program but interest so lagged during Faraday's ice pail experiment that the view suddenly changed to the blackboard where there was at least some activity; Zaki Jamil was diagramming his explanation of the demonstration.

The management apprehensively expected some sort of religious commercial with the appearance of incense smoke but were relieved to see the Cottrell precipitator which deposits charged particles on an oppositely charged plate. Next Nazih Muhammad demonstrated the principles of the Geiger counter privately to those fortunate enough to be in the studio, because at the time cameraman #1 was treating the general TV audience to some fine action shots of Harith Rassam erasing the blackboard, which apparently seemed more interesting than the Geiger counter.

As is true in most electricity demonstrations the climax came with old faithful - the Testla coil. The snap of lightning was loud enough and the flash sharp enough to jar cameraman #3 back to a respectable distance, but he didn't miss the burning paper "house" and Zaki Jamil's final explanation of the principle of the lightning rod. With the last flash of homemade lightning, the program ended for two reasons: first, quite by coincidence, it was planned to end there, and second, the electricity in the studio suddenly went off. Under the circumstances the only deterrent to a sly and rapid retreat was the phantom of the alert cameraman #1 with an eye for action covering the exit in case the current was restored. It was a relief to find that it was not the equipment but a dust storm that was responsible for the electrical difficulty. All departed with the cordial invitation to return again with more fascinating demonstrations.
Mathematics Contest

Fr. MacDonnell started a mathematics club with frequent guest speakers from Baghdad University and Al-Hikma and had mathematics projects for the members to research and present. He also designed a mathematics classroom on the first floor east end of the Rice Science building. In the room were many mathematical artifacts and along the wall was a giant IBM scroll concerning the history of mathematics.

During one of the Parents' Days he was rather taken aback when a parent pointed out that the scroll did not give the proper credit to the ancient Arab mathematicians. The parent was right. It was embarrassing since the Arabs had contributed so much to mathematics, not least of which was that zero is not merely a place holder but a genuine number. Fr. MacDonnell did not point out on the scroll this one item: "The Arab mathematicians contributed ZERO to mathematics", since somehow this did not seem appropriate at the moment.

Each year, after 1964, all fourth and fifth year students were invited to compete with each other for two hours of solving problems in algebra, trigonometry and geometry. About 30 courageous students would come to the mathematics classroom in the Rice Building and Fr. MacDonnell would administer the exam of 15 questions, then later correct the answers and choose the three students who showed the best grasp of mathematics.

On the occasion of the 1966 contest a remarkable thing occurred. After sitting for the contest, one of the students went home to find that his father had been killed by an intruder. Unaccountably the boy was arrested as a suspect and was brought to trial a month later. It so happened that he had just finished a two hour physics lab just before the math contest with, of all people, Fr. MacDonnell.

The murder had taken place about noon so Fr. MacDonnell was the key witness at the trial. He convinced the judge that the student could not have committed the crime because he was with him from 11:30 to 3:30 doing experiments in a physics lab and then right after this taking the mathematics exam. The student was immediately released, but only after Fr. MacDonnell was able to convince the judge that it was a reasonable thing to believe that a student would voluntarily take a mathematics exam. The headlines of an Arabic newspaper read: "Jesuit resolves the conscience of accused slayer." (el-Emel, January 30, 1967, pp. 1,4) Later the real murderer was found. The student was very grateful but did not win the contest.
The Debating Society

The Debating Society's membership was restricted to students in fourth and fifth years. Bi-weekly debates were held in the library reading room and were attended by many students and faculty. Topics chosen from daily school life as well as world events were debated in both English and Arabic. They were warmly contested and it was always the conclusion of the audience that excellent speakers were emerging. The goals of the Debating Society were: to develop a young man's power of expression and offer him fundamental training in public speaking; to familiarize him with the apt reason and rules of logic, with cogent replies, with forceful attacks and to inculcate, through its meetings, the principles and practices of parliamentary law and at the same time to broaden his outlook on all questions of a debatable nature. The enthusiasm of the Baghdad College students for debating was always impressive and augured well for their futures as professional men. In 1948 the first prize debate was held, and its evident success assured its continuance as an annual event in the school activities program. A graduate recalls the debating sessions.

One big advantage of this activity was to train senior students to take part in open discussions amongst a group of interested individuals in that particular topic, as attendance was voluntary. In the process, if the discussions got too hot to handle, it was the duty of the vice president/chairman to steer the conversations into a useful outlet, hence avoiding hurling chairs, and stationery at each other!

(Luay Zebouni, B.C. '67)

The Language laboratory

The Language laboratory of Mr. Comille Tebsherany and Fr. Robert Sullivan proved to be a remarkable and pioneer adventure
for Baghdad College. It proved very effective in helping the language teachers do their job. Both men realized that learning a language is primarily learning to distinguish, understand and reproduce accurately the sound system and not merely the grammatical elements. Language skills included not only reading, and writing but also understanding and speaking. Both men made significant contributions to the field of teaching English throughout the Arab world by experimentation with different types of laboratory equipment. Comille Tebsherany explained the program and its goals: to develop aural perception and familiarity; to inculcate mastery of the basic and troublesome structures; to assist in the ability to read rapidly and accurately; to develop aural-oral ability; to specialize in pronunciation drills (for multi-lingual areas) and to begin work on advanced literature.

Fr. Sullivan's language lab

Mr. Tebsherany warned that: "A language laboratory in and of itself is not a universal panacea, it is not a substitute for a good teacher. But effectively used, it can be instrumental in aiding the language teacher and in accelerating the rate of progress in learning. It can reduce the teaching load. It can ensure that the beginning students are exposed to the sound system of a language as it comes from native speakers". Fr Decker recalls how satisfying the work was.

Fr. Sullivan, Comille Tebsherany and I took care of the language program at the intermediate level. My knowledge of Arabic really helped a lot in this. It was wonderful to see how the boys improved so much in using the language. We also were able to conduct a program for the native teachers of English in the government schools, to enable them to be better models for their students. All of this was extremely fulfilling and I still miss it very much. The happiest years of my Jesuit life were the years I spent in Baghdad and I will always be grateful for this opportunity. (Fr. Decker)
Teachers education by Baghdad College

During the summer of 1964, at the request of the Ministry of Education, seminar courses in English were given at Baghdad College to Iraqi teachers of English. The announcement sent out by the Ministry of Education stated that the Baghdad College facilities would permit us to accept 140 candidates and over 300 applications were received from every section of the country. After a preliminary proficiency examination, two groups were formed, of primary school teachers, and of intermediate and secondary school teachers, with men and women in each group and a total starting enrollment of 91. The two separate courses ran for six weeks, with a three-hour session five days a week.

On August 22, 1966, Fr. Sullivan set to work installing six passive laboratories (labs used only for hearing, not for speaking) in schools of the Baghdad Ministry of Education. These labs were to be part of an experiment in the teaching of English according to modern methods. The installations were made possible through a grant of the Ford Foundation to the Ministry. The teachers in this experimental program were selected by the Ministry from the large number of those who had been trained in the seminars given at Baghdad College. The texts had been specially written for Arabic speaking students by Mr. Comille Tebsherany of the Baghdad College staff, and were successfully tried out at the College. If this worked, the program would be extended to all government schools throughout Iraq. Of the six schools chosen two were for girls and four for boys, in widely separated parts of Baghdad. The program actually got under way at the beginning of the 1966 academic year and the initial reaction had been very favorable. (More is found about this in the New England Province Newsletter, Sept-Oct '66 p. 23.)

At the request of the Ministry of Education, Baghdad College would conduct another seminar for the training of Iraqi teachers of English. This six-month session had been scheduled to start in November, 1966, and this would have been the fifth seminar to be conducted at the College. All indications pointed to an increasing enrollment.

In September, 1965, at the request of the Ford Foundation, Baghdad College inaugurated an English Language Program in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to provide training in English to the civil servants of the Saudi Government. The program was centered in the Institute of Public Administration and was financed by the Saudi Government. The complete course consisted of nine levels, each running for 13 weeks, for a total of 130 hours. A passive language laboratory was installed at the Institute, and formal instruction began September 11, 1966. Fr. Robert Sullivan made
periodic visits to Riyadh to supervise the execution of the program. More information about this program is found in the *New England Province Newsletter*, Jan-Feb '66 p. 16. This Riyadh Program ended its third session July 16, 1966, with 106 candidates successfully completing the requirements of the various courses in which they were enrolled. On August 6, the fourth session began with 176 candidates enrolled in the five levels of instruction being offered.

**Experimental mathematical program**

During the year 1967-68 a modest start was made in an experimental "2A" section of more gifted second year students using the UNESCO research material which had been developed for the improvement of mathematical instruction. It was taught by Fr. MacDonnell and differed sufficiently from the regular curriculum to require a separate section that could stay together for the rest of their time at Baghdad College - 3A, 4A and 5A.

The matter covered in this initiation into modern mathematics included set theory, group theory, Venn diagrams, complex numbers, properties of numbers and properties of operators. The rules for logic, syllogisms, sorites and truth table took a good portion of time. A geometrical analysis of symmetries was also treated.

It was also necessary to make sure that the students did not ignore the government exam syllabus (containing only traditional (though easier) mathematics) or else they would be unfairly judged in these all-important exams. It was important that they not be incorrectly classified and thus unable to enter the higher school of their choice if they knew the wrong mathematics. Only volunteer students who could manage both new and old mathematical approaches were accepted into this section. The program was discontinued after the Jesuits left Iraq.
Religious programs

Distrust between Christians and Muslims resulted from many centuries of conquest and massacres, but on the Baghdad College campus Christians and Muslims found a place where real friendships could develop as well as a deeper understanding of each other's religion. An example of this appreciation is found in a moving letter sent by a Muslim parent to Fr. John Owens, S.J., after he had given a homily to the student body about death, knowing that he himself was dying of cancer and had only a few months to live.

Rarely have I encountered in my life a faith as deep as yours. In Islam, a basic essential in Faith is a complete acceptance of God's will. To accept it in the peace and serenity that you have shown, Father, is rare indeed. I want you to know your spirit in accepting God's will is an inspiring and enriching experience not only to your boys but to us parents, too. To know that in the turmoil of our modern times there still exist people like you, gives us hope for a better world.

(A Muslim Parent)

Another example comes from the reports made by Raymond Etteldorf in his book The Catholic Church in the Middle East.

The non-Christians are not allowed to attend the classes in religion, but for the Christian students a thorough grounding in religion is, of course, given its due emphasis. An example of the results of this training was portrayed to me while I was there. I was told the story of Sabah Jadun, one of the students who earlier in the year had died a saintly death at the age of nineteen.

Sabah was very popular with his fellow students, a star on the basketball team; he was a daily communicant, a zealous member of the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, and an honor student. He told the members of his family that he had bound himself to a manner of life so dedicated to God they were to regard him in the future as "a priest with a necktie." Stricken with a brain tumor and learning that his illness might bring blindness, more intensive suffering, or death, he said simply, "Whatever God wants is all right with me."

(Etteldorf, 1959 p. 132)

In fact the story does not end there. Sabah's close friend, Usam Ismael, a Muslim, spent much of his time and energy that
semester collecting money from the other students to send Sabah to England for an operation. This operation was unsuccessful, but it underscores the friendship and loyalty that existed between Muslim and Christian classmates. The campus brought together Christians and Muslims on an equal footing, expressing in a way the spirit of the new constitution of Iraq, breaking away from the classical mold in which Christians were considered inferior in status. A case in point was Sabah who had a lasting effect on his classmates who left this memento of him in their 1956 Al Iraqi Yearbook.

In picture after picture of school activities Sabah was seen taking part. Because of his prominent role in athletics and in the sodality he captured the imagination of many boys in the lower classes and was their ideal and inspiration. His classmates of the graduating class learned to know him through the years they shared failure and triumph together, but did not realize how precious his friendship had become until he was threatened with the illness that proved fatal. "Being made perfect in a short space he fulfilled a long time" is the comment from the Book of Wisdom which we apply to Sabah to reconcile ourselves to the loss we have suffered in his untimely death. Teachers and fellow students are all better men for having known him and hope to find him again in eternal peace that is rest in God. (Al Iraqi, 1956, p. 12)

All members of the Baghdad College community, both Jesuit and alumni have their own edifying stories of faith. Fr. Crowley celebrated Mass in the various Baghdad churches occasionally, as did the other Fathers. He writes about an event that impressed him. This story is followed by lasting spiritual lessons treasured by two of Baghdad College's early graduates.

During my first month in Iraq in 1953 I was standing outside St. Raphael's Chapel after Sunday Mass waiting for my
ride back to Baghdad College. No one else was around and all
the congregation had left. Two veiled Moslem women came
along and asked "Wain Miriam?" [Where is Mary?] First I
thought they were looking for one of the Christian women but
soon realized they were trying to find the statue of the Virgin
Mary. My ride came and I left them there praying before the
statue. Before this I had heard of Muslim expectant mothers
who wanted to have their babies at St. Raphael's Clinic.
(Fr. Crowley)

I graduated from medical college in 1970 and qualified as a
surgeon in 1977. In 1979 I finished my training in Urology
and in addition to this I have been doing Kidney Transplant
operations since 1989. I am a hard working surgeon working
no less than 12 hours a day and six days in the week. I mention
these things about myself since they have a direct relation to
what I have learned from my years at Baghdad College.

Fr. Loeffler and Fr. Gerry taught me how to work hard. Fr.
Loeffler used to spend a long time gardening while Fr. Gerry
used to spend a lot of his extra time in teaching us in the
Biology Lab. This helped to shift my mind towards live objects
and then medicine. To be a good surgeon, you need to be a
faithful man. Although I attended all the Catechism and
religion studies in Baghdad College in addition to all the
spiritual events, I believe that my faith became stronger when
I met (bless his soul) Fr. Owens a few days before he died. He
was suffering from cancer in 1965. He said to me: "Shawgi, I
feel very happy that I am going to meet Jesus and his mother
Mary, and I hope if you keep on like this we will meet one day
altogether." I felt his strength in his faith and this helped me
since then when I was a medical student till now to fight all
the way and keep my faith as strong as possible. (Shawgi
George Gazala, B.C. '64)

A.M.D.G. [Ad Majoram Dei Gloriam - For the Greater Glory of
God] was a motto which I and many others wrote on top of
every project and even exam papers. I have taken part in
every spiritual event that took place at the College and also
other places when they were run by one of the Fathers in
either the Chaldean or Syrian Church. There were only a few
that were selected from every class to join the Sodality. We
used to have an open retreat at the beginning of every
scholastic year and I can never forget the sermons given to us
by Fr. Merrick. He gave them with great enthusiasm and
passion deep from his heart. After our graduation we used to
join Fr. Merrick in a weekend retreat somewhere in a convent or church and spend two or three days in full meditation and prayer away from the hassle of home and the city. We used to regard Fr. Merrick as a model of sanctity and holiness and I have never forgotten him throughout my life. (George Rahim, B.C. '37)

Service to the poor

Baghdad College students were quite generous and this was evident in many ways, one of which was the annual play put on to raise money for the poor. Sometimes the boys were able to realize I.D. 200 dinars from the proceeds. Also every Saturday boys were assigned to take up a collection in every class and by Christmas they had brought in the sum of 120 dinars which amounted to approximately I.D. 10 dinars per week. During a typical spring these boys really showed their stuff in the "grand drive for the poor" when they gathered 1000 pieces of clothing, 25 dinars in the jar which was placed outside the Mudeer's office, and three sheep. "There were always competitions among the classes about who would top the list in the missions and poor collections."

(Waiel Hindo, B.C. '60, A.H. '64)

Collectors for the poor

Ameena Hermiz Jammo led an exemplary Christian life and was an inspiration to the Jesuits who worked with her. During the summer she would travel the mountainous remote areas of Northern Iraq to the little Chaldean villages to prepare the children for First Communion. She would spend her modest teaching salary helping poor families, purchasing bolts of cloth from which she and the local women would hand sew the clothes for children's First Communion.

After she was transferred to teach in Baghdad, she began to spend most of her time after school assisting the local pastors
and nuns of the suburban churches in religious education and caring for the sick in their homes or in hospitals. She also visited the less-religious families to persuade them to participate in religious functions, and urged them to send their children to the Catholic religious education classes in the local churches.

"Sit Ameena" as she was called by associates and friends ("Sit" is a respectful title roughly translated as "Teacher") was the director and spiritual leader of the Sodality of the Army of Mary of Baghdad.

Despite her advanced years during the 60's and 70's (calendar years exactly matched her age - being born in 1900- ) and regardless of the weather (winter's cold and rain or summer's burning heat), she would still go to Baghdad's remotest suburbs (riding several buses and walking) to participate in religious functions. (Ramzi Hermiz, B.C. '48)

Br. Foley answered the needs of the poor neighbors and Fr. Fennell had a very creative way of collecting money to give to the poor. He sent out to American Jesuit schools asking for used Christmas cards which would be thrown out.

Collections for the poor, taken up regularly in all classes once a week, have always been the custom at Baghdad College. During a war-time, in 1942, an appeal was made to relatives and friends in America, to send us old Christmas cards of every kind. When they arrived, Fr. Fennell, who ran the bookstore, and some of the students went to work with scissors, cutting off the names signed on the bottom of the cards. The cards were given new envelopes, and were put up for sale in the bookstore. As there were no cards for sale in Baghdad during that war-year, the cards went fast, and at a good price!

Some cards had the names still on them of American donors on the bottom of the card. It did not matter, the boys bought them anyway, signed their own name under these names and sent them to their teachers. So the greeting at the end changed from: MERRY CHRISTMAS, from JIM AND MARY KELLEY. to: MERRY CHRISTMAS, from JIM AND MARY KELLEY.

(signed) Abdullah

Enough money was collected to buy 22 chicken dinners for the poor that Christmas. (Fr. Fennell)

Aside from the educational and religious effects we had at Baghdad College, also our social commitment to the local poor were effective on having a good impression of our Mission. The
backyard clinic that I ran for the poor I think had a very positive effect on the neighborhood. The treatments and medicines were as primitive as could be, yet it meant much to people who needed that attention. (Br. Foley)

Fr. Morgan’s Apostolate of Prayer

Apostleship of Prayer

Baghdad College students had always been strong in their participation in the Apostleship of Prayer, a world-wide organization of prayer and good works. The weekly meetings were held each Monday in which the members arranged devotional programs for every occasion. Several interesting talks on the Sacred Heart, the Twelve Promises, the Monthly Intention, and related subjects were presented by the members of the group. First Friday Mass celebrated each month in Saint Joseph’s Church was part of the regular program and hundreds of families had been consecrated to the Sacred Heart. Each member was a promoter in the League and by his fidelity to the ideals of this devotion he endeavored to improve his own religious life and to influence others by his good example. The work is here described by Fr. Morgan and Luay, one of his charges.

Our work used to cover periods after school and included useful discussions, preparation of spiritual material and an opportunity to make new friends. There were discussions of Catechism and I found Fr. Morgan a true Spiritual Scholar. We used to prepare and distribute the monthly prayer cards which I still keep a few, as treasured collections. (Luay Zebouni, B.C. ’67)

By the end of our stay in Iraq, we were distributing as I
recall, some 6000 cards each month, as well as thirty silk screen posters "hand made" on the top floor of the Cronin building, with the help of students, who also helped in the mailing and delivery of the cards. It was sometimes difficult even with our Arabic experts to come out with the exact nuance the English I submitted intended. I recall one month when the intention to be prayed for was the "proper use of communications media" and one student asked me why we were praying for "buses and trains". With the help of Fr. Dick McCarthy and Faraj Raffoul for Arabic translations, we began printing (at Thomas Press) and circulating to various churches and schools in Iraq these "morning offering" cards of prayer, with a bit of doctrine on the back - quoting from Church sources, and after 1963 from the Second Vatican Council then in session. (Fr. Morgan)

Novena of Grace

Following a long Jesuit tradition, the Novena of Grace is held between March 4th to the 12th - nine days of prayer in honor of St. Francis Xavier whose feast day was March 12th. The Baghdad Jesuits preached this Novena at various churches and they were very popular. Sometimes the Jesuits would take turns preaching but the favorite of all was Fr. Richard McCarthy. By the Spring of 1968 Fr. Richard McCarthy had preached his eighth consecutive Novena of Grace at St. Joseph's Chaldean Church. That year the Chaldean Patriarch attended the Novena daily, and on the last day Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Maurice Perrin, Apostolic Delegate in Iraq. But the novenas did not start with Fr. McCarthy as Augustine Shamas reminds us.

Fr. Labran had a generous heart and we shared together his many plans in a humble spirit motivated by a good cause. In the fifties, our churches were not living stones, just buildings visited by some few old people but then Fr. Labran was the originator of the Novena to St. Francis Xavier. He started in the Armenian Church of the Sacred Heart in Karrada. He would say at the end of his homily, "come and get two other friends to come with you tomorrow" and his faith in St. Francis did the job. The church got so crowded that two services had to be held each day. The next year it was in a more spacious Church, the Chaldean Mar Yussef. As the years passed the crowds increased like the multiplication of the loaves and later other Jesuits did the preaching. I still hear the voice of the late Fr. McCarthy ringing in my ears, his homilies in Arabic made us think deeply. No one in Baghdad had ever heard of St. Francis Xavier
until Father LaBran started the Novena and then the faith became so alive that people still make the Novena in thanksgiving for favours received. (Augustine Shamas)

Sodalities
Extra-curricular activities were not limited to sports and debating. There was also a spiritual dimension which was best exemplified by the Sodalities of Our Lady, an institution found wherever Jesuits operated, the Jesuit organization known as the "Sodality" which in some form was active from the earliest days of Baghdad College. Regular meetings were held which focused on the spiritual formation of the Christian student including his social obligation to those around him. The students regularly came up with projects to aid the poor, neglected, and the sick. There were summer sessions not only for catechetical instruction but for remedial class work. In the fifties under Fr. Joseph LaBran with the aid of Alumni Sodalists, these programs took on the air of a summer school which ended with a Novena preparing for the celebration of First Communions on August 15. There were many Fathers who directed the Sodality and contributed to its growth and popularity among the students, but special mention must be made of Frs. LaBran, Shea, Donohue and O'Connor.

The year 1954 was declared worldwide Marian Year and 116 countries sent representatives to Rome. Our Baghdad College contingent boasted of 18 Iraqis. We took a bus across the Syrian desert to Beirut and boarded a Turkish boat to Naples. We had to sleep on the deck using our baggage for pillows. Once in Rome, however, the colorful blue sashes of the Sodality became a big hit. The students never forgot their Roman experience. (Fr. LaBran)
Way of the Cross on the roof of the classroom building

The Sodality was meant to enliven the spiritual lives of the Christian members as well as instilling in them the principles of the Gospel, especially the lesson of reaching out and serving others. The Sodalities had a large number of service projects, instructing children in their catechism and collecting food and money for the poor. Fr. Mahoney described his succeeding the great Fr. LaBran.

It was not an easy assignment to be the successor to Fr. LaBran. But the first thing I remember about the assignment was the wonderful group of students who offered themselves to this spiritual endeavor. It certainly was not easy to emulate Fr. LaBran with his grand extravagances like the dances he organized and above all: the Petroleum Sunday celebrations. When those affairs occurred, I was in the confessional hearing confessions, since there were not many Fathers who could hear confessions in Arabic. The groups I worked with were very active and their major work was to teach the children of our workmen the fundamentals of the Catechism.

The Sodalists were just like ordinary boys of their age. During the St. Francis Xavier Novena ushers were needed for the daily exercises at the Chaldean Church. When at a meeting I asked who wanted to be ushers (wearing a glamorous blue sash of the Sodality) there was a great rush to the sign-up list and the table was almost toppled. They wanted their relatives and friends to see that they belonged to the elite Christian organization at Baghdad college. Another event which the Sodalists enjoyed was their pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The lads were certainly impressed. We boarded in the Franciscan hostel, Casa Nova, and the boys thought they were treated like kings. (Fr. Mahoney)
My three brothers graduated from Baghdad College and so my friendship with the Jesuits was enduring. "I shall always treasure those precious fruitful years working with the Jesuits in Baghdad as a special inspiration that added direction and meaningfulness to my life." Each year a special World Sodality Day was held inviting all Sodalities of the city to Baghdad College grounds for a huge procession and Mass in the open air. The crowds were unbelievable. Fr. LaBran had a fascinating way in drawing people to worship by his generosity of heart and his great enthusiasm in doing the job for the greater glory of God. We all helped and felt so happy and grateful. (Augustine Shamas)

The apostolic effects of the Sodality lasted long after the Jesuits left as is reported in a 1991 letter relating a recent conversation with the Carmelite Fr. Raymond, already mentioned, who worked with the Jesuits in the Sodalities many years ago.

Fr. Raymond spoke eloquently about the Sodality of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma. He said the bonding in faith which occurred in those groups has been a mainstay of the Christians ever since. Even after our schools ceased to function under Jesuits, the Sodality members and the movement itself survived in various parishes (and rites) and continues to provide support, solace and hope for many. Fr. LaBran as well as Fr. Fred Kelly was mentioned by Fr. Raymond as the principal inspiration of this reality. (Letter from Amman)

One of the Sodality activities focused on Petroleum Sunday which was a religious celebration held on the last Sunday of May on the Baghdad College campus. A Marian float was carried in a lengthy procession around the campus and this was followed by a Eucharistic Benediction. The celebrations lasted from 1952 to 1958 and was due to the zeal of an American oil worker, a daily communicant and friend of Fr. LaBran, George Ehrhard from Elizabeth, New Jersey. He wanted to thank God for the gift of oil and to pray for all those who worked in the oil industry. Organized by the members of the Sodality, it was a very colorful pageant and attracted hundreds of people.

**Religious instruction**

The project of Catechetics adapted to Baghdad caught the interest of several Fathers such as Fr. Marrow who visited centers of instruction each Friday and later Fr. Scopp who saw Catechetics not only for the early religious formation of Baghdad
College students but also for the other schools and parishes. Summer, in the context of the Sodality, was a very practical workshop for several Jesuits working with the alumni.

Helped by Sodalists and other volunteers the Fathers organized and directed catechism courses for many Christian children in the neighborhood. They were prepared for First Communion, which was usually held in the summer.

(Fr. Morgan)

The Christian Center

Summer activity finally motivated some close Iraqi friends to finance a Christian Center where young people could meet for social, intellectual, and religious exchange and development. The Carmelite Fr. Raymond worked closely with Fr. LaBran, whose dream it was to make the Center an important place for Christian encounter attracting not only Baghdad College and Al-Hikma people but also Baghdad University students and alumni. Later Fr. Young was assigned to this work. The participants came initially from Baghdad College and Al-Hikma for regular gatherings and discussions. The Carmelites kept the Center going after the Jesuits were dismissed, and attracted students from Baghdad University who started a program of adult education in Christian Doctrine. The Carmelites had nothing but praise for the members of the Jesuit Alumni Sodality who worked with them to keep the Center active through difficult years. One of the most important people in this was Augustine Shamas who together with Walter Young told the following history of the Center.

Fr. LaBran had great insights into the needs of the church in Baghdad and so he saw the need for a Christian Cultural Youth Center. A major concern of his was a center which would not only be social but educational as well, where young people and their families could gather on holidays and in the evenings. "We want a Center, we need a Center" was his constant enthusiastic refrain. Not a man to give up easily, nor to sit passively on the sidelines, he pushed and persuaded until most obstacles and restrictions were eliminated: obstacles and restrictions emanating from both the government and Church authorities as well. He did his best to realize it, but at the time there were many obstacles, and unfortunately his dream came true only after he left Baghdad.

Eventually though it happened and the corner stone of the "Center" was laid in 1959 in the Karrada section of Baghdad on land owned by the Carmelite Fathers within walking distance of
a hundred homes of Baghdad College students. Many activities and celebrations were held in a part of the city which was already marked by the presence of such popular clubs as the Chaldean Hindia Club, the Assyrian Sports Club, El Meshriq Club and El-Alwiiya Club. The Center's great success testifies to the seriousness of purpose, common sense and genuine Christian faith of the Iraqi students who frequented it.

Approval from both the government and the Church was difficult to obtain. The building site and its lay out had to be agreed on and the composition of the participating groups had to be determined. Since the purpose of the "Center" was to bring together many different groups in order to share their Faith, to grow in a caring manner, and to act with justice and compassion, the building had to be big enough to accommodate large numbers of people. Well-established groups of adults who were to monitor the youth of the Center included the Catholic Ladies Benevolent Association and the Sodality of Our Lady of Bannecuse, under the spiritual direction of Fr. Merrick.

Large numbers of Iraqi students began to frequent the Center to participate in its varied activities almost as soon as the doors opened, the immediate success of the Center with its outdoor cinema and gardens, its attractive auditorium and modern, comfortable meeting rooms was a surprise especially to those who had expressed anxiety over the project. Much of the credit was due to the generous efforts of the Jesuit Fathers Kelly, O'Connor and Young, and of the Carmelite Fathers Rene, Robert, and Raymond. The work of the Center's mixed team of advisors testifies to a remarkable spirit of collegiality among priests of diverse religious orders sent to Iraq from separate countries. The advisors worked together in harmony sharing with Iraqi students their collective wisdom and skills. Most advisors conducted their work in Arabic.

Because of the zeal and talents of these men a spirit of cooperation spread into local churches which were divided into different rites such as Chaldean and Syrian, both Catholic, but unable to work closely together. A catechetical school for primary and secondary government school students was established. The program brought religious instruction to scores of Christian youngsters every Friday. Weekly classes (along with movies) were held alternately in Chaldean and Syrian locations. Buses supplied by Baghdad College, the Chaldean Sisters, the Carmelite Fathers and the Sisters of the Presentation picked up students from the four corners of the city and transported them to and from the University sites of the classrooms. Five hundred young girls and boys were
involved, many of whom were from families which had emigrated from the North of Iraq to Baghdad. Iraqi clergy and laymen of both rites served as teachers in this program.

The story of the Center is not only about clergy but also of talented faithful lay people as well. The Center's survival after Jesuit educators and advisors were expelled is the ultimate proof of its success. For the years following, the takeover of Baghdad College, the Center continued to thrive and eventually evolved into an adult school of continuing education where courses in theology and Church history were taught.

The Center's advisors in particular had expert advisors themselves. These experts emerged in the persons of two gifted and patriotic families, Razoog Shammas was a respected international lawyer; his devoted wife, Augustine Shamas, was a devout member of Fr. Merrick's Sodality. Their door was always open, their home became an office for frequent consultation and on many occasions dinner was served in the evenings.

General Ephram Hindo, one of the most respected Christian public figures in Iraq, his wife Laila Hindo, and their large family were always available for advice and support. The good council they offered to anyone who sought it was not only perceptive and beneficial but seasoned with Christian charity.

The Center encompassed the following four groups.
2. The Legion of Mary, founded by the Dominican Fathers was an enthusiastic group who visited the sick and prisoners and brought their clients both spiritual and material help.
3. The Christian Cultural Club, by far the group with the highest profile in the Center, was composed of students from Al-Hikma and Baghdad University. One of the organization's purposes was to create a good social environment for male and female university students.
4. Fr. Young's Youth Sodality for boys who had failed out of Baghdad College were gathered together in a program in which they could appreciate the care the Jesuits had for them. The group assembled once a week to ask questions, to pray, to prepare slide lectures for catechism, to socialize and to recreate. They formed a football team and once took a summer trip to Northern Iraq during the Kurdish up-rise. The rebel Kurds sent escorts to meet the group when it reached the limits of government-held territory since the Kurds had heard that the boys were somewhat affiliated with Baghdad College. (Augustine Shamas and Fr. Walter Young)
The Minor Seminary (1963-1969)

The formation of the clergy for the Chaldean, Syrian, and Greek Catholic communities was a concern of Church authorities and the Jesuits were anxious to find ways to cooperate. Minor seminaries were a regular institution in the formation of the clergy and it was thought that joining the seminary with a good secondary education at Baghdad College might be the answer. The Chaldean Patriarch had taken the initiative and asked the Jesuits to train the high school age candidates who would like to later enter the Major seminary at Dora. They lived in the rented house opposite the Boarding school and were prefected by Fr. Regan who made occasional trips to the north of Iraq to visit the families of seminarists.

Other Jesuits, Frs. Como and Mulcahy, were later assigned to the task. The Jesuits, however, never had the chance to follow through to a Major seminary, and as Jesuits look back, nothing they could have done would have equaled the work done by the multi-ritual seminary of the Dominicans at Mosul whose graduates are the mainstay of the Church in Baghdad. (Fr. Donohue)
Social Activities

The canteen was the center of much of the social activity at Baghdad College because of its location surrounded by the athletic fields. In the sixties it was run by "Adam" who served special meals for the faculty. It was not exactly the Stage Door Canteen, but it was a place the students could get a good samun sandwich and a bottle of Fanta or Kawthar or something wet. And like all places where high school students gather, it was always on the verge of turning into bedlam. The Jesuit scholastics had to patrol the Canteen just to keep order. Many still have clear memories of the poor scholastic who had duty on Mondays, Sunday evening he would develop a fever. But it was not only at noon, for lunch, that the canteen was a place of encounter. It was also the place Muslim students used to while away the time until the Christians finished their religion classes. Several of the upper classmen were always playing cat and mouse with the poor scholastic assigned to prefect. (Fr. Donohue)

Parents' Day

In 1965 Baghdad College adopted a new custom called Parents' Day. Each semester all students' parents were invited to see the school, parade around the beautiful campus, walk through the laboratories with their proud son, and meet the teachers with a sometimes humbled son. The Jesuits and the "Misteria" were stationed at strategic places to greet the parents, make sure that they found their way along a predetermined route and offered them some modest repast. Students were instructed to show off how smart they were to their attentive parents and disgruntled siblings by taking it upon themselves to demonstrate the laboratory apparatus. The invitations were sent out in Arabic five days before the event and entrusted to the student. During each semester Fr. Sullivan busily collected campus action scenes on film which were shown at the next Parents' Day. These were the same films put onto cassettes and sold at past reunions. The Parents' Days became very popular for the families who seemed to enjoy them as much as a picnic. Oddly enough not much was said about the students' marks, even though the teachers were ready for questions.

An illustration of the pressures put on the students during these Parents' Days follows from a daring and trusting student who took a chance and lived to write about his experience.

In the middle of my third year, our parents were invited to
come to the school and take a look on almost everything at the school facilities. I was afraid to invite my parents, because I was not doing well that year and I was afraid of what would happen to me if my father would ask "How is my son doing at school?" I asked one of my Jesuit friends: "Do you plan to give my parents a status report on how I am doing?" He said "No, this is merely an opportunity to meet them and have fun with them." There was still doubt in my mind whether they would reveal my poor performance - just like St. Thomas when he said "I do not believe that Jesus is risen from the dead till I see him and touch his wounds". When the time came my father asked the question I was expecting: "How is my son doing this year?" The answer was that I was doing well and suddenly the subject was changed to something quite different by my Jesuit friend. I still believe that he saved me from a punishment that I would have gotten from my father.

(Kamal Youkhanna Rayes, B.C. '66)

**Visiting Wakes and Funerals**

One of the regular practices of the Jesuits as members of Iraqi society was to attend wakes and when possible, funerals. Funerals did not allow much notice but there was plenty of time to attend wakes since they were held often both in the Muslim and in the Christian homes. In a traditional society with strong family ties, wakes and funerals are social occasions. This posed no problem, so many of the Jesuits were of Irish background from New England where wakes and funerals have the same sort of standing - or they did until someone invented the Funeral Parlor. Actually, attending wakes, both Muslim and Christian, was an initiation into society. To see the way people accepted death and the purging that accompanied the rite was instructive.

Since burials in Baghdad took place the same day as the death, funerals were difficult to attend, but Jesuits had a very strong presence among the bereaved. Many would attend the wakes during the first three days, the seventh day, the fortieth and the day following major feasts (be it Easter or Christmas) which was a day of mourning for the family of the deceased.

Celebrities were not ignored: for instance in 1966 the schools were closed for two days on the occasion of the death of the President of Iraq, Abdul Salam Arif. Jesuits attended the funeral service. A wreath from the Jesuit Fathers was placed at the coffin where the body lay in state at the Presidential Palace.

**Visiting families during the feasts**

On important national feast days Jesuit officials would go to the palace for the "signing of the book", a ceremony at which
government protocol officials would welcome those coming to sign. But most of the Jesuit visiting concerned ordinary people, the rich, the poor and the very poor families of the Baghdad College students. On major feast days (Christmas, Easter, Id al Fitr) the Jesuits had the practice of visiting the families of the students in order to demonstrate their solidarity with the people of Iraq.

Fr. MacDonnell visited a home at the urging of an Armenian student to find that he was away on an errand and that his mother did not understand any English. While having tea, which was offered to guests, Fr. MacDonnell made what small talk he could. "The winter is cool, the river is deep and the brown cows are eating the green grass on the high meadow." After having used up the only three sentences he had learned in his five months in Baghdad, and not hearing much of a response, he thought it was about time to say good-bye. So he left a charming but puzzled host. At mathematics class on the following Monday a conversation went something like this. "Where were you when I came to visit your house?" "On an errand. What language were you speaking to my mother?" "Arabic." "She does not know any Arabic, she only knows Armenian. What were you saying?" "It was nothing you would be interested in. It was grown-up talk." Students were merciless in dealing with their teachers who were trying to learn Arabic, especially if he was a beginner.

During the vacation times some of the Jesuits went to Basra in the South or to Mosul in the North, visiting families of the students. All were extremely hospitable but one of the most welcoming families was the Shemdin family, a prominent Kurdish Muslim family who owned property in Zakho in Northern Iraq, and many of the 13 children (two sets of twins) attended Baghdad College and/or Al-Hikma. The family was accustomed to offering sanctuary to those in need and on more than one occasion protected large groups of beleaguered Christians. Hazim Shemdin, born in 1901, was the name of the father. Yusuf Shemdin, the grandfather of these many Shemdin alumni of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma received an award from Pope Leo XIII for his protection of Christians who took refuge from hostile marauding armies near the Shemdin home. The armies would not dare attack the Shemdin household.

The all time champion visitors were Frs. LaBran and Donohue who visited no less than 36 families in two days. During his visits Fr. Sara was asked by some of his relatives about the motivation of the Jesuits which he kept to himself lest he seem to flatter his colleagues. "Why are these handsome young men here? They could have had anything they wanted so what are they doing in Baghdad?"
Living and teaching for three years (1945-1948) at Baghdad College was a wonderful experience and rare opportunity for an American Jesuit for many reasons. Baghdad was part of one of the great non-Western cultures, a culture profoundly different. Baghdad is a historic ancient - and modern - capital of the Arab and Muslim world, a world distinctly "other" than the United States or Europe in history, languages, religious peoples and cultures. Further, around Baghdad lay a countryside of extraordinary archeological riches. Religiously, Iraqis are overwhelmingly Muslim, Sunni and Shiites, but the Christian minority is a mosaic of different churches, each with colorful histories and customs. The Arab-Israeli conflict, centered on the problem of Palestine, that would explode in May 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, an event which profoundly affected everyone living in the Middle East. I and other Baghdad College Jesuits lived for two months in Bethlehem during the Summer of 1947 and, visiting by bus all of Palestine, we grew sensibly aware of the incredible growing tension, and sensitive to the fears of Palestinians regarding their future.

If I had come to Baghdad to work in the U.S. Embassy or some American firm, I would not have had much contact with Iraqis. But as a teacher and boarding school prefect, I had daily living contact with Iraqis of various backgrounds, religions and languages, sons of poor and rich families alike. Teaching students is an extraordinary way to get to really know people. Further, we entered into the lives of the families of Iraqi teachers and students in diverse ways, by visits to Muslim and Christian homes on their feast days, by attendance at wakes, funerals and weddings, by invitations to dinners and celebrations in Iraqi homes where we found a hospitality that was overwhelming. At Baghdad City track and field meets we watched with pride as Baghdad College students performed with great success. We traveled around the country during vacation time and met students' families in Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk. In Faish Khabur, which in 1994 is the only entrance/exit between Northern Kurdistan and Turkey, we were guests of the Agha, the head man of the area, who sent his sons to Baghdad College.

All these experiences gave us a special, intimate contact with our students and their families and, like a key, opened our minds and hearts to a profound understanding of our vocation as teachers, as well as learners. From what I have been describing, it is clear that I myself learned at least as
much as I taught. For me, the people of Iraq had become part of my heart and spirit. (Fr. Ryan)

A young Jesuit had promised to visit a Christian student’s home at Christmas. Although armed with exact directions on how to get there, the Arabic street signs failed him. He came to what he thought was his student’s home and received a royal welcome. His student was nowhere to be found so he thought he was out visiting another Christian family. After the vacation the student expressed regret the Jesuit didn’t keep his promise. Then he found out that it was the home of a Muslim neighbor that he had visited. They received him like a long-lost brother, although they had no idea why he was visiting them. (Fr. Crowley)

First "5-year" graduation class: 1937

The June Graduations

The 1937 Baghdad College graduating class was the first class to have finished five years and also the smallest in the history of Baghdad College. It consisted of only 7 student-graduates: Tariq Munir Abbass, Louis Boutros, Antoine Tabib, Sayed Hussein, George Rahim, Abboudi Talia, and Edward Thomas Zoma.

Graduation exercises at King Faisal Gardens sometime in the middle of June officially brought the school year to an end. Tickets were always difficult to get since many people wanted to be included among the 2000 guests. Sharing the platform with our 50 to 80 graduates would be an impressive host of dignitaries representing Church and State: the Apostolic Delegate, Bishops and Archbishops of the Oriental Communities, a Member of the King’s Council (or later of the Republic), the Cabinet Ministers of Education, Social Affairs and Finance, the Lord Mayor of Baghdad and members of the Diplomatic Corps. Our young graduates certainly did not lack surrounding brilliance to light their exit from the stage. All families of the graduating fifth class looked forward to the spectacle of the graduation held in June at the Royal Gardens, one of the most impressive events of the year.
Lay Faculty

The Jesuits were very concerned that the lay faculty were a bit removed from many school activities so there was always the danger that they might not feel included in the life of the school. They had their own faculty room where they met each other in between classes. Rarely would they meet the Jesuits and Misters who were usually mingling with the students in sports events and conversations between classes. Jesuits wondered how the students interpreted this distance between the laity and the Jesuits.

A gathering of the faculty

Since many of the teachers had heavy teaching loads in other schools, lunch was the only time they would be free to socialize with the Jesuits and with each other. Plans were in the works to make them members of the school's decision making committees but these were thwarted by the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1969. During the last few years the Jesuits established a custom of inviting them to lunch at the Jesuit house, and this made a wonderful difference and improved greatly the interaction between the two groups. Of course there was always an annual end of the year faculty gathering where Jesuits would socialize with the lay faculty. Fr. Donohue comments on one such party and the courtly Mahmud Yusuf.

It was at these meetings that many Jesuits learned what real politesse meant. Some of us recall Ustadh Mahmud Yusuf, Egyptian professor of Arabic, telling us that all families in Baghdad were beseeching God that a son be born to them so they could send him to Baghdad College. (Fr. Donohue)

Fr. Sara asked a Muslim teacher why he came to the Sulaikh
campus every Friday, his day of rest, to teach Arabic. He answered; "I want to come and look forward to coming. When I come here I am in a different world. It is a green place of friendship and peace."

Jesuit exodus to villa

The vacation exodus from Baghdad occurred a few weeks after graduation when some Jesuit Superior, cast in the role of Moses, led the community out of the desert into the mountains of Lebanon at Ghazir. The vacation spot in the north of Iraq, Inishk which was mentioned earlier, had proved unsuitable so the Lebanese Jesuits invited the Baghdadis to come and spend the summer in their minor seminary which was vacated by the seminarians. They went back to their families for the summer for their own vacation. Some Jesuits stayed behind in Baghdad to staff the offices and carry on with various works of the ministry. They in turn would be replaced in the course of the summer so that all might have some respite from the Baghdad heat.

Boarding students for the year 1949-50
Athletic programs

A large portion of each Al-Iraqi Yearbook is dedicated to the athletic events of the previous year and it is surprising to see how many students participate in some sport. Some senior classes were very good in helping the younger students get their games started. But usually from year to year much depended on what games the Jesuits and the lay volunteers preferred since they would organize the events if the senior students did not take the lead. Boxing, for example, flourished when Fr. James Larkin was on the campus; otherwise the gloves were put away for the year. American football was played occasionally but it could not compete with "Iraqi football" (soccer). Waiel Hindo comments on the central place of sports and Hamid recalls how the Jesuits got after students to play sports.

Fr. Quinn wanted to make an athlete out of me but I could not take sports seriously. He would point his finger at me and yell; "Shinoo binoo minoo?" I showed him I could do something and gave the 1963 BC graduation speech at King Faisal Gardens. (Hamid Attisha, B.C. '63)

In sports the Baghdad College teams were so good, that many members of these teams became stars in the Iraqi official teams or the sport clubs in Iraq. In the 1948 Olympics in London two of Baghdad College students represented Iraq. In 1952 more students represented Iraq at the athletics competitions in Egypt. Frs. Quinn and Sheehan were known to be creators of heroes in track and field. In basketball Fathers Egan and Regan - the brothers as we called them - contributed tremendously to the improvement of the basketball game in Iraq. Two sports events that were also very popular with the students were the yearly Baghdad College track meet day and the All-Star baseball team which played against the Father's team on thanksgiving day. (Waiel Hindo, B.C. '60, A.H. '64)

Softball was a game that everyone liked and was played on every available field. Basketball was probably tied with baseball in popularity. More than one of the Jesuits have happy memories of the informal games played on the softball diamond and basketball courts.

Fr. Quinn in charge of the game
Looking back at Baghdad College I remember most vividly playing basketball as a young scholastic with a contingent of Kurdish scholars. I remember especially Sirbest and Salah. What wonderful friends they were. The thing I can't remember is who won all those games? However, I remember those kids clearly. There was a small pool by the basketball court where, after the games, we would sit in the cool waters and be refreshed - like the waters of Babylon!

(Fr. Hicks)

**Soccer Football**

There is something about football that is universally attractive in every country that can produce a level field. Perhaps it is the fact that everyone is in the game and no one can slack off. Baghdad College students had an agility lacked by their American teachers who envied the way they could use their foot with a ball as if the foot were a hand, causing the ball to do exactly what they wanted it to do. They could put as much spin on the ball as they wished. As a result the Fathers were not very successful in coaching this sport. Nevertheless the students would come back with victories and trophies from the Baghdad inter-school tournaments most of the time.

**Basketball**

Winning a trophy in the city tournaments was not unusual for Baghdad College, but occasionally the newspapers would describe Baghdad College victories with unusual eloquence. In 1958 the Arabic newspapers complimented Baghdad College in using Fr. MacDonnell's "al man to man" defense as "new". It must have puzzled Arabic readers to see "man" spelled out in Arabic letters. From the 1958 *Al-Iraqi Yearbook* comes the description of a successful basketball season.

The keynote of our victorious season was harmonious teamwork; it was very clear early in the season when we surprised the A'adhamiah Club with a "new" brand of basketball called "al man-to-man" defense (only as old as Dr. Naithsmith - the inventor of basketball in 1891); apparent even when an unpublicized Mansur Club came up to beat us at our own game; and finally no less evident when we snatched the City League trophy from Tajara with a smooth display of screening and passing. Nonetheless, mention must be made of Manuel Jurgis's shrewd defensive tactics; of Muhammed al Durrah's fast breaking prowess; of Sameer Vincent's agile tapping which helped earn for him an average of 19 points per
game, of Ibrahim's pivot work and ball handling; of Wayil Kubba's play-making and 'heads-up' driving; of Sudad al-Jaobaji's defensive rebounding and 'floating' skill. These were the united efforts of our favorite competitors. (Al-Iraqi Yearbook, 1958)

Fr. Mahoney inherited this team the following year and would reach the court for practice and find all players waiting to go to work which made it an easy job for a coach. In an effort to keep them busy and still preserve some strength for himself, he borrowed a clock to speed up their passing in a ten second pattern. He had in fact set it for eight seconds and his players became very good ball handlers. Fr. Mahoney describes his season and was pleased and felt that our sports program was recognized and appreciated more than we thought.

An informal basketball game

It was a long season. The first game was played in October and the final game for 'the cup' was played in May. This was a very exciting game. Down by eleven at the half our lads noticed the TV cameras and they came back against the older and better players. Since it was our third successive cup victory we gained permanent possession of the trophy. A few months after the great game while I was walking along Rashid Street, a young man crossed the street and congratulated me on our victory, saying that he enjoyed the game very much. (Fr. Mahoney)

Two notable events happened during the season. We went to Markaziya Secondary school where the basketball court was the courtyard of the school with classrooms and balconies all around. During the game, the referee called a technical foul on Baghdad College and pointed to the balcony - there were two or three of the Fathers who had come to watch the game - Fr. Thomas Kelly got a little carried away in protesting the referee's call and that's why the "man in the balcony" got a technical. The coach, Fr. MacDonnell objected to the referee: "This is the first time I ever heard of a foul called on the audience." He heard the referee point at him and say; "Two
technical fouls on Baghdad College." We won anyway.

The other event was winning the city championship - Baghdad College played Technical or Commercial school - Falah Akram, who left Baghdad College after third year, was a natural athlete and the best of the opposition - Baghdad College had Sawa Ishu, small but effective shooter; Sameer Vincent, Nazad Uthman, etc. at half time, Baghdad College was behind - in the second half, when Nazad was moved to center from his guard position, the game changed as Nazad could challenge Falah Akram under the boards - Baghdad College won.

(Fr. Pelletier)

At the age of 12 to 15, basketball was one of the most important things in my life back in 1961-1964. I wanted to be on the "second bus" going home, just to enjoy another 45 minutes or so of basketball. Owning a basketball was a real privilege. You never have to leave the court even if your team lost - you would quickly declare "Ani Abu Atoba" [It's my ball] and everyone would understand and accept your special status with respect so you would play again and again.

(Ghassan Jamil Hami, B.C. '66)

**Baghdad College marches in the government track meet**

**Baseball**

As ordinary growing youngsters, Baghdad College students were interested in playing games. At first baseball was a mystery to them but it did not take long for them to catch on. Once they caught on to the game they relished the playing against other classes and finally for the championship of the whole school. How fast did the youngsters catch on to the game? Very quickly: one year one of the reading assignments was from the life of Helen Keller. During one of the games
when one of the Jesuit umpires made an unpopular call, the cry came from the bench "Helen Keller is the umpire."

Games were played during a double lunch period and a Jesuit had to be present so that the students would not wander in the path of a swinging bat. Fr. Mahoney found he had only one of these periods free so when his class implored him to be at their midday game for the semester he protested that he would miss his lunch. The students solved the problem, after that each day they brought him a sandwich: "come on Father, eat your lunch so we can play ball." (Fr. Mahoney)

In the Fall of 1968 the Baghdad College Jesuits discovered that the good old days were gone when they could field three baseball teams at a time against the student body. Gray hair and expanding paunches took their toll, and so the boys took the faculty of Fathers and Mistres in the annual November baseball game, to the tune of 9 to 3. Mr. Belcher was their fading batting star, but he was very, very tired the following day. Fr. Loeffler was seen training for the game by cutting down old eucalyptus trees on the property with his hefty axe. His hard training paid off: he was the only Jesuit to cross the plate.

For this Jesuit-student baseball game in November classes ended early. The students rooted for (or against - depending on how the studies were going) their Jesuit teachers pitted against the student all star team. With no bleachers a short person was at a distinct disadvantage since close to 800 students were crowded along the first and third base lines. Fr. MacDonnell noticed a rather enterprising but short student from his own physics class arrive with a beautifully designed periscope, with the letters O-P-E-N arranged vertically along the side. It did the trick. He saw the whole game including all of Fr. MacDonnell’s runs, hits and errors. When asked where he got the idea and what the letters meant the enterprising young man produced the golf section of an American sports page showing a crowd of spectators using similar devices. He did not know what the significance of the letters O-P-E-N meant but considered it an integral part of the mechanism and unlike most of those spectators was able to create a wonderful optical instrument to get the job done.

**Track**

Track events included hurdles, shot-put, high jump, broad jump, hop-step-jump, pole vault, 50 meters, 100 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters, 800 meters, 1500 meters, relay teams, discus, and javelin. Some of the early stars in
these events included: in the pole vault Joseph Jurji ’45 and George Azzo ’47; in the high jump George Naum ’47; high hurdles Claude LeMerle ’46 and 200 meters Albert Atchoo ’39. 

(Peter Atchoo, B.C. ’47)

In 1951 two students from Baghdad College, Kamal Tereza and Sarkis Garibian were selected by the Iraqi Olympics Committee to represent the Iraqi basketball team in the 1951 Pan-Arabian Olympics in Cairo, Egypt. I believe that was the first time a Baghdad College student was selected to play on an all-Iraqi team. Although, in the past, Baghdad College noticeably influenced high school sports, especially basketball. Our basketball teams and individual players had tremendous influence on the style and caliber of the basketball played in the major high schools, but they were never selected for the national teams. (Sarkis Garibian, B.C. ’52)

Handball

It was difficult to get a court for handball, and teachers were aware of the students who had a game on a given day by the alacrity with which they left class after the prayer. The courts were on the far side of the canteen and were always crowded with players as well as spectators, students as well as teachers. The Fathers were fascinated by the skill the students showed with their feet. They were able to place the ball in the corner with little effort. When a Jesuit objected to a student that it should not be called handball because players use their feet also, he got the answer: "Your football should not be called football since you throw it most of the time. In fact it is not even a ball; at least handball is a genuine ball." The Father retreated to think that answer over.

Tennis

Three tennis courts were lined up side by side with the usual tennis problem of balls going in every direction, and amateurs hitting a ball from another game. It was referred to as a "three ring circus." The solution in the early forties was to erect wire fences, separating the courts. It was an immediate success. As in other sports there were continuous tournaments and award ceremonies. Arguing from year to year statistics it seemed that
the Armenian students excelled in this sport. Since the maximum was two players for a team, mixed languages would not be a problem. Fr. MacDonnell noticed that Armenians tended to speak Armenian to each other when they got excited, for instance in a tight game - a very natural reaction. So when he coached the basketball team he would either have five Armenians or one on the court at the same time because any other combination would mean that in the heat of battle there was a serious lack of communication - one language too many, Arabic and Armenian. This was not a problem in tennis.

Volleyball

There were so many different sports played at Baghdad College that it was difficult to find space and time for everything, so the volleyball team entering the inter-city tournaments faced a real challenge. Nonetheless these valiant volleyball teams had nothing to be ashamed of and brought home a fair share of honors.

Boxing

Boxing was introduced to Baghdad College by Fr. James Larkin in the late forties and quickly became one of the most popular pastimes of the school activities. It became a full fledged intramural sport in 1948 since so many students were holding informal bouts at the entrance to the main classroom building, a very central location. Crowds would gather, watch and then decide to try it themselves. Under the careful eye of Fr. Larkin the serious contests prepared the participants for the government tournaments. In fact he had a difficult time choosing a team since so many had become proficient at the "manly art of self defense." It was clear that Fr. Miff did not have a clear idea of the game as Bishop Jolson recalls.

At one period boxing was a sport at Baghdad College. Once Fr. Miff was asked to bring the boxing gloves to a picnic. When the moment came for the sport, Fr. Kelly asked Fr. Miff to
Finances

Baghdad College tuition was very low by American standards, but raising it always created the worry that some talented students might not be able to come. An example of how the tuition was decided might be taken from one of the academic years. During the scholastic year 1952-53 the total income from the 760 students (tuition plus fees) was ID 16,114 and their total expenses came to ID 32,984. The student body was 670 during the year (having started at 683) so after some arithmetic these figures indicated the extent to which the students' education was being subsidized. For 670 students average income for each was ID 24, while the average expense for each was ID 49. It was decided to increase the tuition in gradual increments according to class.

Students fees in ID dinars  {not including lab fee, graduation etc.}

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Planning for the future

Jesuits are notorious planners and the Jesuit planning for the future of the Baghdad Mission was far from haphazard, but quite deliberate and far reaching. The Baghdad Jesuits discussed among themselves their goals and continually re-evaluated the long-term objectives of the mission. An example was the following analysis started in the fifties through the sixties concerning the needs of the country and of the Church. Both are found in the Province Archives on the Baghdad Mission. The earlier (fifties) document is found in the correspondence between the Superiors and the Provincial and was referred to as Our Primary Apostolate. The conclusions to this study included the following.

1. We could be asked to do other things in Iraq besides teaching school; e.g. entrusted with a press, with a parish, with the direction of Catholic Action throughout Iraq, etc.
2. The Holy See expects us to be aware of the changing needs of the Church and to take the initiative in meeting these needs.
3. We should not assume works which are outside our own
proper field of activity and it is safe to say that there is no other project of the Jesuit Iraq Mission which rivals this primary aim, that of educating Iraqi youth, and it should not be compromised.

4. Surely the study of the Oriental rites, Catholic or Orthodox, would be in line with the directive of Fr. General.

5. It is necessary for us always to be most circumspect. Our zeal can easily cause offense. Thus, we should always remember that our public Novena of Grace, Petroleum Sunday, the annual "Mission" generally preached in the fall to the general public are extraneous to our primary work. They should neither interfere with school work nor should they interfere with the work of the local secular clergy.

The second item of planning listed here was presented during the Province-wide planning in the late sixties. The study concerned three distinct needs.

1. The needs of Iraqi society
   a. Education at all levels which will instill an openness of mind.
   b. Technical education to prepare the technicians so badly needed.
   c. Teacher training programs which attract intelligent students.
   d. Cultural enrichment programs for poor children.
   e. Education to patriotism which should replace other loyalties.
   f. Education of all citizens to an understanding of social change.
   g. Cooperation between Christians and Muslims in preservation of religious values and in creating a true social consciousness.
   h. Sociological and anthropological studies of urban/rural areas.

2. The needs of the Church in Iraq
   a. A much broader education for the clergy and religious women as well as a system of continued education for the clergy, aiming at the development of an open, critical mind.
   b. Basic but modern religious instruction for poor Christians.
   c. A theological orientation for Christian university students.
   d. An understanding and appreciation of Muslims.
   e. Education of hierarchy and adult Christian laymen.
   f. Social services for the urban Christian poor.
   g. Professional groups of Christians leading to social action.
   h. Joint projects with Muslims for rendering social services.

3. Working for the underprivileged
   a. At Baghdad College each year we should admit a small group of students from deprived backgrounds who will receive special help and tutoring to make up for their educational deficiencies.
   b. We should enlarge the summer tutoring program already established which is conducted by our lay apostles for poor
students who are preparing to re-take the Government Baccalaureate examinations: especially English courses.

c. We should open a special summer school at Baghdad College for the graduates of government schools who are about to enter the Medical, Engineering or Science Colleges. An intensive course in English would prepare them to attend lectures given in English.

Another item started around this time was the Academic Council in the Fall of 1968 to discuss difficulties, programs and policies of the school. Members were Frs. Raymond Powers, Pelletier, Gibbons, Loeffler, MacDonnell, McCarthy, and Regan. Some of the topics covered included: communication among all the faculty, Jesuit and lay, overly long punishments and Mass attendance. In the course of planning for the future the following recommendations were submitted in January 1956 concerning Baghdad College.

a. Need of a committee to study the organization of the five-year English course to effect greater unity in grammar
b. Need of explicit arrangements for coordination in teaching of science in English and Arabic.
c. The need to encourage the idea (both with students and faculty) of the value of literary English study, once grammar is grasped, as an excellent mental preparation for all college work.
d. English teachers might be encouraged to visit the public secondary schools to see how the English language is taught by Iraqi teachers to Iraqi students and how drill work is done.

As if this was not enough planning, in 1968 a Jesuit principle of one of the New England Province schools was invited over to inspect Baghdad College and offer whatever suggestions he considered warranted. He had sound advice on the governance of the school as well as ideas on involving local Iraqi faculty, but admitted that most of what he had to say had already been set in motion by Fr. Carty, the rector and his advisors.
Rome's effort to create new Middle Eastern schools

Fr. James Burke in his history of the New England Province spends several pages describing the many burdens assigned to the Baghdad Jesuits which were really distractions from their work in Iraq. These included possible schools in Basra, Haifa, Transjordan and Teheran. It consumed the energies and the time of some very talented men, such as Fr. Madaras, Fr. Sarjeant and Fr. Anderson. The problem was in part due to the success of Baghdad College. Because of their experience there was great demand for their sage advice as well as actual involvement in other educational projects.

Over the years (1932-1945) the fame of Baghdad College had come so often and so loudly to the attention of Roman officials that the apostolic value of the school was very evident. The mission itself, seemingly unaware of the contretemps concerning school or hostel, always insisted that it was founded to conduct a school in Baghdad. (Burke, 1986, pp. 201-211)

Basra In 1940 Baghdad College staff was raided in response to a request of the Sacred Congregation, to have Baghdad Jesuits replace Carmelite Fathers in the supervision of a grammar school in Basra. The school was first supervised by Fr. Leo J. Shea from 1940-1942. Fr. Michael J. McCarthy took over this task when Fr. Shea returned to the college to replace Fr. Madaras as Minister and Procurator. Likewise, Fr. Merrick had gone there in 1942 for apostolic work including armed forces chaplaincy work. Eventually the experiment was canceled.

Haifa Earlier in 1937 they were asked to examine the possibility of establishing an equivalent of Baghdad College in Haifa. This plan, if carried out, would call on some veterans from Baghdad or draw on the same reservoir of men who were trying to cope with an increase in Baghdad College commitments. Fr. Madaras had made the survey and recommended against it. His conclusions were accepted by the Roman authorities that had requested the study. So this possible leakage of manpower was avoided.

Transjordan and Teheran When Fr. Anderson was dispatched in 1939 to investigate Transjordan, his assignment was viewed as a further diminution of the principle work which Pope Pius XI requested of the Jesuits in 1929 - Baghdad College. In 1949 Fr. Anderson was sent to Teheran to investigate the possibility of starting another school. He knew the Chaldean Archbishop who had formerly worked in Baghdad and he knew the
Rome's requests to create new schools in the Middle East 153 apostolic delegate from his days in Cairo. In spite of this the decision for the Jesuits to start a school there was negative. It was still negative when Fr. James Burke was sent on the same errand in 1956.

Fr. Vincent M. Burns, S.J. noticed other evidence of this success: men were sent to other Middle East Jesuit schools, not only from Baghdad but directly from the Province.

After the remarkable success of the New England Jesuits teaching in Baghdad other New England Jesuits were sent to Beirut to teach English in the French Jesuit College and University there. They taught all levels in the College through the Baccalaureate and in the University: in the Engineering School, School of Medicine, and School of Oriental Letters. In September of 1953, they moved with the College to the newly opened facilities at Jamhour, but continued to teach as well in downtown Beirut at the University. Their contact and rapport with Baghdad College was extensive and very helpful - for knowledge of the Arab temperament and more, for the relationship between the Christian and Islamic cultures in the Middle East. They spent Christmas and Easter with the Baghdad Community where the spirit of New England Jesuits was imbibed. (Fr. Burns)

*Faces of eager students at assembly anxious to get to class*
The influence of the Jesuits in these decades

Fifteen priests from the Sulaikh Community traveled around to Baghdad parishes each Sunday. Masses were celebrated in churches, convents and an orphanage. Confessions were heard in all these places. The Jesuits would usually celebrate the Latin rite Mass in Arabic, and in most of the parishes there would be Baghdad College students who would serve the Mass.

The Sodality marches in the Petroleum Sunday procession

There follows a few quotations as examples of the influence the Jesuits had on Baghdad College graduates. Also Fr. Belcher recalls a renowned Baghdad track coach philosophizing.

Majid Samarrai, the father of two students at Baghdad College, was the Olympic track team coach. One day I was watching them work out and Majid and I were talking. Then, quite beautifully, he said to me, "Father, I remember when the Fathers first came to Baghdad. There was nothing but desert here. Now, look at all the grounds, buildings and students here at Baghdad College. It is as if God put this hand over Baghdad College and protected it from all danger." (Fr. Belcher)

The Jesuits had a profound effect on my life and career. The fact that a group of Jesuit priests would leave their native lands and settle in a totally foreign country for the sake of providing a level of education second to none in the Middle East overwhelms me with admiration.

Their dedication to their mission was a lesson in
perseverance against all odds, and their deep sense of commitment. Their departure marked a turning point in my life and left its indelible mark on my psyche. I always lament the fact that what this superb educational experience afforded to me was forever gone for those who came later. The spiritual and educational vacuum left behind by the departure of the Jesuits was never filled again.

Graduation day

I believe that the Jesuits’ story in Baghdad should be written, chronicled and documented for all Alumni to read, preserve and pass on to their successors to enjoy and be proud of. The Jesuits’ story was a labor of love and kindness and should also be communicated to the American and Iraqi governments. It could bridge the wide gap of distrust and miscommunication which have been prevalent since the Gulf War. (Jack Joseph George, B.C. ’67)

When I first started at Baghdad College there was only one student, Scott, in my class who was good in English. Our Jesuit teacher said that “till everyone understands every word I say to you, Scott will translate it to Arabic.” This procedure lasted only a month and after that everyone was on his own. This was completely different from the way things were taught in other schools where the students who did not understand would be punished in a severe and embarrassing way.

The other interesting and challenging thing was the way the students were punished when they disobeyed the rules. They would write about 500 sentences or pick up all the leaves or papers from one of the baseball fields. No other schools used this new procedure.

Everything was like a revolution, whether it was in the way
classes were taught, or the way sports were played, or the students' relations with the teachers. The students and teachers were real friends and when I say friends it actually meant what the word is. Speaking of sports, students were not allowed to join a team or play sports if their average was below 60%.

One last thing I want to add which I learned from the Jesuits, it was to understand things which only make sense and are logical. One time in a catechism class, our teacher was asking a simple question so that we could realize how things are put together. He said "Can God make a square circle?" At that time I had a real hard time understanding what that meant, but the more I think about it today, the more I realize that if things do not make sense then they do not mean anything. (Kamal A [Rayes] Youkhanna, B.C. '66)

*Set up for the hurdles on track day*

*The decathlon champion Bob Mathias visits Baghdad College in 1957*