Chapter 7

Chronicles of Al-Hikma: 1956 to 1968

'Teach me to labor and not to ask for reward, except to know that I am doing your will.'
prayer for generosity of St. Ignatius

The beginnings of Al-Hikma

Because of their successful efforts in secondary education the Jesuits had long considered an extension to the inviting field of higher education. Their motive was not to compete with very competent and modern existing colleges in Iraq, but rather to encourage their Baghdad College alumni to remain in Iraq.

Responding to a need

The attempt to provide higher education by sending the undergraduate abroad was not an adequate substitute for undergraduate education at home. Iraqi parents objected to uprooting an immature person from their Iraq environment, and planting him in the strange environment of an American or other foreign college only to have them uprooted again to return to their native land. Some young people thrived on such an experience, but these changes to and from life in America and elsewhere were altogether too abrupt for the ordinary youth. So the Jesuits at Baghdad College were often importuned, by Muslim and Christian Iraqis to open an institution of higher learning.

Starting Al-Hikma was not immediately approved by all Jesuits in the New England Province because of the province problem caused by over-extension. A Jesuit committee discussed the project and some members of the committee thought that the project was neither desirable nor feasible. The reasons pro and
con were carefully weighed. The majority, however, regarded the foundation of Al-Hikma University as one of the most significant and far-reaching steps ever taken by the New England Province and its existence was seen as tremendously important.

**Request sent to the Iraqi Government**

It was decided, then to approach the Iraqi Government on this matter, requesting permission to start a university and requesting land for it. With no objections the Ministry of Education, on May 5, 1955, gave permission for the opening of Al-Hikma University with two four-year courses, one in Engineering Physics, and the other in Business Administration. These two courses were chosen because of Iraq's urgent need of engineers and administrators. Using two separate decrees, in 1955 and 1956, the Government of Iraq granted to the University the free gift of 272 donums (about 168 acres) of land in Zafarania, a suburb in the southernmost part of Baghdad. It was about 14 miles by road from Baghdad College, which was in the northernmost part of the city. This gift was a striking testimony to the high esteem in which the Jesuit work at Baghdad College was held.

**Grants making Al-Hikma possible**

The confidence which the Iraqi Government had in the Baghdad College Jesuits is dramatically shown in a sequence of efforts supporting them in their new venture. Fr. Hussey requested land and without delay a 544 donum piece of government land (one donum is 2,500 square meters) in Zafarania was designated to be divided up. It was on the Diyala River 2.4 miles east of the Tigris, 3 miles north of the confluence of the Tigris and Diyala Rivers and 14 miles south of Baghdad College in Sulaikh. In the first grant the Jesuits were to receive 200 donums (500,000 square meters or 125 acres). Not only that, the Iraq Government let the Jesuits choose which part of this site they preferred. The Jesuits chose a plot so that most of their property would lie close to the main highway and would have a narrow (20 meter wide and 2 miles long) corridor running down to the Diyala River. The property widened out at the river so that they could install a pumping station. On 2/18/56 the title deed was finally drawn up by their lawyer Khalid Isa Taha. This first land grant, Royal Decree #785 was dated 9/10/55. Later another adjoining 72 donum plot (44 acres) was requested and later received according to Royal Decree #230 which was dated 3/19/56. This brought the total area to 272 donums (168 acres). This was a remarkable subsidy for the Jesuits when one considers that the Sulaikh property which they purchased in 1934 consisted of only 25 acres. At the time the land was worth about a half million dollars. Detailed documents (28, 31, 36, 37, 57, 63) for the grants are found in Appendix D.
Al-Hikma University Campus 1956 - 1968

The 168 acres of land given to the Jesuits in 1955-56 in two parcels: the first (4/4) stretched more than 2 miles to the Dlala. The second (4/5) is shown with the dashed border. For each the Royal Decree was verified by the Council of Ministers.

<---- All buildings were in the Northwest corner of the property

comparative size of the Baghdad College property 25 acres

one mile

one kilometer

4/4 First grant 9/10/55 Royal Decree #785
9/14/55 Council of Ministers' decree #3974
200 donums = 124 acres

4/5 Second grant 3/7/56 Royal Decree #230
3/19/56 Council of Ministers' decree #3974
72 donums = 44 acres
Later when Fr. Hussey asked the government to assist him in acquiring financial aid from United States agencies he received full government cooperation. It was an impressive acknowledgment of the Iraqi's high esteem for the work of the Jesuits in Iraq. The earliest and most crucial gift, these two generous land grants which the Jesuits requested were mentioned in the official government publication: *The Iraqi Gazette*. It was signed by Prince Zaid "Acting in place of the King".

**Sept. 19, 1955**
Translation of No. 37: - Royal Decree #785 granting to the Iraq American Educational Association in Baghdad 200 donums of government land as a free gift for the purpose of erecting a building for higher education. This Royal Decree appears in the official government publications, *The Iraqi Gazette* (Jareedet el-Waqaa’i el-Iraqia), #3695, of Sept. 19, 1955. Royal Decree (Erada Malakla) #785 After a study of the first paragraph of the twenty-third article of the ASASI Law (basic constitutions of Iraq laws), and in virtue of the third article which regulates the transference of ownership of government buildings and arasat, and in accordance with the authority conferred on us, we have issued this royal decree on behalf of His Majesty, King Faisal the Second.

Following the recommendation of the Minister of Finance and the approval of the Council of Ministers, we give to the [Jesuit] Iraq American Association in Baghdad ownership without fee of an area of 200 donums from the Treasury's share in the piece of Miri Land Granted In Lezma (number 4, section 2 - Zafarania) for the purpose of erecting buildings for higher studies and for expansion.

The Minister of Finance will execute this decree.

Written in Baghdad on the 22nd day of the month of Muharram, 1375, which corresponds to Sept. 10, 1955.

Acting in place of the King
[Prince] Zaid [brother of King Faisal I who was grandfather of King Faisal II]
Khalil Kanna             Muhammad Ali Mahmud
Acting Minister of Finance    Acting Prime Minister

After granting the land to the Jesuits the prime minister, Nouri el-Said (es-Sáeed), used his influence to acquire money from foundations for the school by sending letters such as the following to the Ford Foundation. After this (2/3/56) letter was received by the Ford Foundation, their Near East representative, Mr.
Rowland Egger responded favorably and with great speed (2/28/56) to Fr. Hussey. The Iraqi Government and in particular the prime minister could not have been more supportive in helping the Jesuits acquire the money needed to start their new university. Here is the letter of the prime minister Nouri el-Said.

Document #43  Letter of H.E. Nouri el-Said, Prime Minister of Iraq, to the Near East representative of the Ford Foundation, recommending aid for the university project of Baghdad College.

Council of Ministers' Office, Baghdad 2/23/56.
Mr. Bowland Egger, Near East Representative,
The Ford Foundation, P.O. Box 2379, Beirut, Lebanon.
Dear Sir,

On May 5th, 1955 the Iraq Minister of Education gave Baghdad College permission to begin courses of higher education in business, science, and engineering. On September 10th, 1955 a Royal Irada was signed which granted Baghdad College 500,000 square meters (about 124 acres) of land to be used for educational purposes. Thus the Government of Iraq has shown its interest in the part played by Baghdad College in the education of Iraqi youth.

We understand that Baghdad College has presented the Ford Foundation with a request for financial help. It is a request for 431,100.00 Dollars to enable Baghdad College to build on the above-mentioned property and to hire suitable professors for the education of their Iraqi students.

We take this occasion to recommend their request for your consideration. We feel sure that whatever help you give to Baghdad college will be used for the welfare of our nation through the proper education of our youth.

Yours Sincerely
Nouri el Said

Fr. J. Larkin inspects a new wall
As a result of this intervention the Ford Foundation Overseas Division gave $400,000 for four buildings: the Business Administration Building, the Faculty Residence, the Cafeteria and the Library. Also for the erection of these buildings on the new Zafarania campus Al-Hikma University received generous assistance from other sources. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation of Lisbon provided $140,000 for the Engineering Building. Complementing the Ford Foundation grant was a grant of $200,000 from the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Church through the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. Another important grant included $110,000 from the U.S. Department of State in conjunction with the Point-Four Program, for the purchase of equipment.

The Jesuits sent letters asking for financial help from other Jesuit schools. Here is a letter (2/10/56) from Fr. Hussey asking for help from a sister Jesuit college, Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut (where some outstanding Jesuit Baghdadis later went to teach after their dismissal from Iraq).

Our first steps met with remarkable cooperation. The Government of Iraq did not balk at granting us permission for such an institution. Point-4 helped us out with a donation of $110,000 for educational equipment. Then the Iraq Government let us choose a site of 124 acres which they gave us for the asking.

There will be obstacles and among these is the fact that Iraqi youth go to Government colleges free of charge. We
shall have to charge something like $450.00 a year for tuition. To attract students, especially the worthy poor, to an institution that has yet to prove itself will be difficult in the face of the Government competition.

It should be obvious to your practiced eye that this is a request from Fairfield for $450 each year for the next four years to finance one free tuition scholarship.

Our venture is not without grave and timely importance. It is this which made the Apostolic Delegate in Jerusalem say that he thought it would be far wiser to spend on Baghdad College the money now being collected for the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

(Fr. Hussey to the president of Fairfield University)

Objectives of Al-Hikma

The goals and objectives were clearly stated in the first brochures and early literature about Al-Hikma. No one ever accused Fr. Hussey and Fr. Anderson who wrote many of the proposals of being vague.

The name Al-Hikma

The naming of Al-Hikma was not done precipitously as is seen from Fr. Hussey's letter to the N.E. Provincial, Fr. FitzGerald.

I put aside any purely religious names on the recommendation of our sympathetic Muslim friends. This included the rejection of Jesuit University. I do not think that the Government would allow us the name Iraq University when their own is to be called Baghdad University, it would look as though we were above them. I did hesitate over the name Babylon University but there is that difficulty that Babylon has not a savory reputation in history and, especially in the Exercises of St. Ignatius. If it appeals to you over in the U.S., I would be very willing to reconsider it. We searched around for other names, traditional names of Baghdad like "Zawra" or "Dar al-Salaam" (now the name of an Adventist hospital here) but each had its own difficulties.

"Al-Hikma" can serve as the basis of our putting the university under the patronage of the Spirit of Wisdom or of Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom. It had these religious associations for us and yet for the Muslim it is still appropriate for a center of learning.

(Fr. Hussey to Fr. FitzGerald, 4/7/56)
This letter refers to a ninth century (830) Caliph Ma'mun of Baghdad, who sponsored the establishment of an institution known as Bait Al-Hikma (The House of Wisdom). It was there that Muslim and Christian scholars worked together in translating into Arabic many of the classic works of Greek philosophy, medicine, science, and mathematics. Their translations (done in Baghdad) of Greek literature, philosophy, medicine and physics were passed on to Alexandria then to Andalusia (Spain) and finally reached Europe. So their work had a considerable influence on medieval European thinkers and writers and thus was a factor in the formation and transmission of Western culture and civilization. All this is relevant to the role of Al-Hikma in both its immediate and broader contexts. "Al-Hikma" also recalls to many as "The Seat of Wisdom," so long and so intensely venerated by the ancient and still vibrant Oriental Churches. Most of all it reminds us of Incarnate Wisdom. This is why the University motto was: "All wisdom is from God." The ideal of wisdom is the ideal of a true university. This ideal was expressed by the medieval Arabic philosopher Al-Kindi in his famous definition of wisdom as: "Knowledge of the truth and action in accord with the exigencies of the truth."

The goals of Al-Hikma

The objectives of the new university were stated in the Al-Hikma catalogs. An example is the following selection from the 1960 catalog.

Al-Hikma University aims to promote the intellectual, moral and professional development of its students. The curricula contain a balanced program of liberal studies and professional courses which together contribute to the mature development of the students' advancement into scholarly or professional studies and work.

In both the liberal and professional studies, a special effort is made to follow the fundamental principle of the Jesuit plan of studies. "The student should be induced to work at his studies and develop himself by self activity
rather than by passive listening; apart from the mere acquisition of information, the natural powers and talents of the students receive training and development."

The professional studies are designed to provide the student with a solid undergraduate foundation in business or in physics and the engineering sciences. The integrated program of liberal studies aims at developing habits of clear, logical and accurate thinking through such courses as logic, mathematics and the natural sciences; the mastery of clear and forceful self-expression through such courses as composition, language and public speaking; a knowledge of human nature through courses in literature; a knowledge of the present, the past, a contemporary social consciousness, and an attitude of social and civic responsibility through courses in history and social sciences; a clear knowledge and appreciation of ultimate values through courses in philosophy and, for Christian students, in theology.

Al-Hikma University strives to supplement the formal curriculum with extracurricular activities. It aims to educate a true and finished man of character not only through its courses but through the campus atmosphere, through an interest in music, in reading and speaking, and in other cultural activities, and by a program of intramural sports.

The training at Al-Hikma is individual and academic, but it is also social and civic. It seeks to develop the talents of the student so that he will be prepared to employ these in the service of his country, the Iraqi Republic. The historic Revolution of July 14, 1958 has stressed the obligation which all men have to contribute to the uplifting of their fellow citizens. Al-Hikma University aims to promote in each student along with formation in studies, a spirit of responsibility, obedience to properly constituted authority, a sense of social justice, initiative and cooperation. (Al-Hikma Catalog, 1960, p. 10)

**Ideals Embodied in the Seal of Al-Hikma**

The seal of Al-Hikma University consists of a very simplified arabesque on a round shield bearing the name, and
the date of founding, of the University. Within the arabesque are the flame-crested "IHS", which is the seal of the Jesuit Fathers, and the jar overflowing in two streams, a symbol of widespread popularity in ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, recalling the rivers that flowed out of Paradise in the ancient narrative of creation (see Genesis 2:10). Superimposed on the arabesque are three inscriptions. The central one is the name of the University in modified Kufic script. The other two are the Arabic and English versions of a theme prominent in

the ancient sapiential books, All Wisdom is From God. Thus, the seal well sums up Al-Hikma: a University conducted by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in the Land of the Two Rivers where, from the dawn of civilization, the scholar's ideal was pursuit of Wisdom whose source is God. (Al-Hikma Handbook, 1967, p. 2)
Personnel at Al-Hikma

The student enrollment steadily increased to almost 700 students in 1968 when about one-fifth of the students were women. The graduates were getting jobs at a time when jobs were scarce. The number of good applicants to Al-Hikma was steadily increasing in spite of the fact that Al-Hikma had to charge tuition while the University of Baghdad charged nothing. Fr. Joseph Ryan, S.J., the Dean (1956-1966), gathered together an impressive faculty from different parts of the globe. Among the Arab faculty were Al-Hikma graduates of the earlier years, who had received their doctorates in America. Also two of the professors were involved in UNESCO's revision of secondary mathematics education for all the Arab states.

The Al-Hikma faculty

It was not until 1956 that the Jesuits actually began classes, with a total enrollment of 45 in the two courses. From 1956 to 1959 the classes were held in the Cronin Building of Baghdad College, and the small Al-Hikma Jesuit staff lived with the Baghdad College community.

The regular faculty was composed of Jesuits and Iraqi professors, while each year a certain number of visiting professors, on special grants from abroad, supplemented the regular staff. So, for example, at the opening of the academic year 1964-65, the active teaching faculty consisted of 48 members. Of this number, 12 were American Jesuit Fathers, 8 were visiting professors from America, 24 were Iraqi professors, and the other 4 came, respectively, from Iran, India, Holland, and the Philippines.

Many were the talented teachers at Al-Hikma during its 12 years and through the efforts of Jesuit friends in the U.S. Congress like Thomas (Tip) O'Neil, Fulbright Grants were made available. An illustration of the variety of backgrounds can be seen from the following list of American Professors at Al-Hikma University during the years 1956-1967, arranged according to their years of service, their name, their home university and their field.

The following priests and religious have taught at Al-Hikma:

Sister Blanche Marie, St. Elizabeth's College, Convent, N.J.
Sister Mary Liguori, Mundelein College, Chicago.
Sister Edward Cecelia, St. Rose College, Albany.
Sister Mary Columbani Monroe, Michigan.
Rev. Andrew Maloney, C.S.B., St. Mark's Col., Vancouver, B.C.
Rev. Charles Rust, S.J., Loyola University, Chicago.
Bro. Alfred Welch, F.S.C., Manhattan College, N.Y.
American Professors at Al-Hikma University during the years 1956-1967, arranged according to their years of service, their name, their home university and their field.

Four were funded by foundation grants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>name</th>
<th>home college</th>
<th>field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58-9</td>
<td>Dr. Walter Zukowski</td>
<td>Colby</td>
<td>Business Admin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59-0</td>
<td>Pf. John Fitzpatrick</td>
<td>Catholic U</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pf. Louis Volse</td>
<td>San Diego State</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-2</td>
<td>Dr. Naser Bodiya</td>
<td>U. of Detroit</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-seven were in the Fulbright-Hays Program:

| 56-7  | Pf. Charles McKinley | Hiram, Ohio        | English       |
| 57-8  | Pf. Richard Stewart  | U. Colorado        | Thermodynamics |
| 58-9  | Dr. Francis Worrell  | Beloit, Wisc.      | Physics       |
|       | Dr. David MacAlpine | Oklahoma State     | Engineering   |
| 59-60 | Dr. Alvin Pierson   | Fresno State       | Business Admin. |
|       | Dr. Fred. Wilhelmsen| Santa Clara        | Philosophy    |
|       | Pf. Roy Bremer      | U. of Detroit      | Engineering   |
|       | Dr. Vin. Vitagliano | Manhattan College  | Engineering   |
| 62-3  | Pf. Kenneth Lenzen  | U. of Kansas       | Engineering   |
|       | Dr. Daniel Lloyd    | D.C. Teachers Col. | Mathematics   |
|       | Pf. Franklin O. Rose| Colorado State     | Engineering   |
|       | Bro. Alfred Welch   | Manhattan College  | Mathematics   |
| 63-4  | Dr. William Ferrante| Rhode Island State | Engineering   |
|       | Mr. Radwan Bekovich | Industry           | Structural Design |
|       | Pf. Walter Jennings | Monterey           | Mathematics   |
|       | Pf. William Beck    | Chatham (Pitts.)   | Mathematics   |
|       | Pf. Frank de Falco  | Worcester Poly.    | Engineering   |
|       | Dr. Clement J. Nouri| Oklahoma City U.   | Management    |
| 66-7  | Mr. Frank de Falco  | Worcester Poly.    | Engineering   |
|       | Dr. Lucien Curtis  |                    | Economics     |
|       | Dr. Samuel Fox      |                    | Marketing     |
|       | Dr. Lewis Wagner    |                    | Economics     |
The Students

The Student Body is remembered by Fr. Ryan with whom students had many an encounter. He planned it that way.

I was very impressed by the experience of Al-Hikma students adapting to an academic system that was new and threatening to them. A small percentage of Al-Hikma students had been to Baghdad College, which they entered very young - after six years of Primary school - and where they adjusted remarkably to the discipline of studies. They did so rather willingly, because, apart from primary school, they knew no other, they were young, and because Baghdad College was for them a truly exciting and enjoyable experience.

But what of the overwhelming majority of the other students who came to Al-Hikma from government schools? They faced many serious difficulties. For example, instruction in English at Al-Hikma was a formidable obstacle for them, especially in freshman year. They came knowing some English but often not very much; and in any case they had never grappled with English as a language of instruction before.

Fr. F. Kelly's engineering drawing class

A second difficulty was that these students were five years or more older (than they would have been if they entered Baghdad College). Not only were they older, they were already partially "formed" adults; they had strong convictions already about themselves, about life and about study. They did not naturally relish being put into an academic system far more
disciplined than what they had experienced in the government schools which they had attended, and also far more disciplined than what they would be exposed to if they were at the state University of Baghdad.

In Baghdad University at that time, some courses ran for the whole year, with the only examination coming at the very end of the year. Why study seriously and consistently early in the year? Why not wait until the exam was imminent and then cram? At Al-Hikma all courses were one-semester. More than that - and this was particularly shocking for these freshmen - each course usually had three monthly examinations. Iraqi students had a found anxiety about exams, and with good reason. They all had to take three national exams; at the end of Primary, Intermediate and Secondary school. Unless a student passed each of these, he could not go further. If he did not eventually pass the Secondary exam, he had no possibility whatever of going on to college in Iraq.

Further, the emphasis on memorizing was a serious obstacle. My own experience (teaching chemistry at Baghdad College) was that students would much prefer memorizing many applications of a scientific principle than thoroughly learning the principle itself first and then learning to apply it. Of course, once they were obliged to master the principle first and got used to much application, they were liberated from the tyranny of memorizing.

Thus freshmen entering Al-Hikma, unless they had been to Baghdad College, faced tremendous frustration, humiliation, anger, anxiety and fear. To help them face all these negative emotions, which are deadly to serious study, I conducted the famous and memorable Dean's Hours, once a week throughout first semester. Here together we probed the problems of freshman year. I would point out the differences in the academic discipline at Al-Hikma and explain the reasons. I tried to show how the Al-Hikma program was good for them, even though painful, how it would, if accepted, by them contribute to their growth and development in studies and to their freedom and general happiness.

What was their reaction? First, they listened. Then they wrestled with my comments; they objected; we discussed these objections. In all this, I sensed that there was a curiosity on their part to understand the strange new ways of teaching peculiar to Al-Hikma. More than that - and this was crucial - there was a willingness, mixed with fear, to try out my proposals.

And the results? They discovered for themselves much truth
The Students

The Student Body is remembered by Fr. Ryan with whom students had many an encounter. He planned it that way.

I was very impressed by the experience of Al-Hikma students adapting to an academic system that was new and threatening to them. A small percentage of Al-Hikma students had been to Baghdad College, which they entered very young - after six years of Primary school - and where they adjusted remarkably to the discipline of studies. They did so rather willingly, because, apart from primary school, they knew no other, they were young, and because Baghdad College was for them a truly exciting and enjoyable experience. But what of the overwhelming majority of the other students who came to Al-Hikma from government schools? They faced many serious difficulties. For example, instruction in English at Al-Hikma was a formidable obstacle for them, especially in freshman year. They came knowing some English but often not very much; and in any case they had never grappled with English as a language of instruction before.

Fr. F. Kelly's engineering drawing class

A second difficulty was that these students were five years or more older (than they would have been if they entered Baghdad College). Not only were they older, they were already partially "formed" adults; they had strong convictions already about themselves, about life and about study. They did not naturally relish being put into an academic system far more
in what I had to say. As time dragged slowly and painfully on, they began to see some good effects of Al-Hikma's academic discipline in their own lives. Students whose marks in the national Secondary exams had not been brilliant - and there were many of these - discovered that Al-Hikma's system was good for them, precisely as slow learners, and brought out the best in them.

Dr. Louden's business class

Further, they compared themselves to some of their friends at Baghdad University, a huge institution trying to grapple with enormous problems arising out of increasing student enrollments. One such friend at Baghdad University might, for example, in his accounting course, have no textbook but only a small pile of teacher's notes, and this for the whole year. After all, textbooks in most cases had to be imported and were very expensive. The Al-Hikma student, on the other hand, had a big standard U.S. textbook for one semester which the professor led him through, section by section, often painfully. But the end result was accomplishment. The student experienced in himself a new feeling, a transformation, a sense of mastery. This sense made all the academic suffering worth while.

One Al-Hikma engineering graduate who was an excellent student at Al-Hikma, tells of how, when he was applying for graduate studies at MIT, he was asked since Al-Hikma was not widely known, how MIT could judge the academic quality of its program. The student ticked off the engineering textbooks he had used at Al-Hikma, the same as were used at MIT. And he was ready to be examined in them. MIT was satisfied.

This transformation I have been describing, which I saw happen each year, was a wonderful source of happiness and satisfaction for myself. It readily explained to me why so many Al-Hikma alumni, as they moved on to graduate studies and into the professions, where they could compare themselves with graduates of other universities, were so successful. And
why they look back with deep gratitude and satisfaction and happiness on their Al-Hikma years. (Fr. Ryan)

Some Sisters at Al-Hikma were not teachers but students. One was a remarkable woman, Sister Joseph, who has fond recollections of her years at Al-Hikma. Another was Miss Najla Thomas, a student in the Sophomore Engineering class, who had joined the Sisters of the Presentation in France. Her father graduated from Baghdad College and she was the first vocation from Al-Hikma.

I joined Al-Hikma because some Jesuits had told me that without a university degree, I would not be able to go much further in teaching. I had entered the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation at 18 years of age, and my parents were too poor to afford a higher education for me after High School. After taking my vows at our Mother House in Tours, France, I was sent to Baghdad to teach English! There were children of all nationalities, rich and poor alike - some paid tuition, many did not! I replaced a British Sister who disliked my American accent, so she trained me by having me read to her in a "British" accent for an hour every day, for a year.

Many of my former pupils joined me. Fr. Mulvehill held me responsible, in a certain way, for the girls at this Co-ed University since most of them had been my pupils at our Bab-el-Shargy Presentation School. (Sr. Joseph Pelletier A.H. '66)

The student body was composed almost entirely of Iraqis, although there are a few students from such countries as Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, as well as occasional students from Europe and America. Facility in English was important since instruction is almost entirely in English. The University became coeducational in September 1962; in 1964 there were 94 women students enrolled. There were no boarding facilities on the campus but a residence hall for women students had been opened a short distance from the University campus. 40 of the 98 graduates in the first five graduating classes were accepted for graduate studies in their specialties by such universities as the University of Illinois, Oklahoma State University, the University of Kansas, Ohio State University, Boston College, DePaul University, Brown University, Syracuse University, Clark University, and the University of California at Berkeley.
The six Al-Hikma buildings and the dates construction started.
All were built in the northwest corner of the property, close to the Basta road.
The Iraqi government not only gave Jesuits 168 acres but also gave them their choice of several properties.
Move from Sulaikh to Zafarania

In November, 1957, ground was broken at Zafarania for the first building. By September, 1959, the Engineering and Business Buildings were completed. In the course of Al-Hikma’s first three years at Sulaikh the Jesuit architect, Fr. Leo Guay, was busy with the construction of the buildings which he had designed for the permanent Zafarania campus. In the summer of 1958 the historic July 14th Revolution toppled the Monarchy, and Iraq became a republic. Anxious days followed. The country underwent sudden and violent changes.

But Al-Hikma went serenely on, and Fr. Guay quietly continued his construction work, so that by 1959 the campus moved from Sulaikh to Zafarania. For nearly a year, the pioneering Jesuit Community occupied interim quarters on the second floor of the Business Building, temporarily slept in class rooms, ate their meals in an unfinished laboratory, and depended on solar heating for their hot water. The following year they finally settled down in the spacious residence, Spellman Hall, designed and built by Fr. Guay.

This new campus, with assistance from Fr. Loeffler and his Iraqi gardeners, became one of the most attractive sights in the city. The enrollment, slow in the beginning, made rapid strides, and the facilities were taxed to the limit. As in Baghdad College, the athletic program and the wide and varied offering of activities made for a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. Al-Hikma alumni who entered business or pursued graduate studies testified to the academic excellence of the University.

Graduation
At the Zafarania campus the first graduation was held in June 1960. Major General Abdul Karim Qasim, the Prime Minister of the Republic delivered a talk and presented the diplomas. More than 1000 people attended and among those present were the chief officers of the new revolutionary government and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

When Al-Hikma began operating in September, 1956, its total (Freshman) enrollment was 45 and in a short eight years the enrollment had grown to 530. By the time the Jesuits were expelled the enrollment had grown to 656. The student enrollment steadily increased, but the number of Jesuits actively engaged in administration and teaching did not grow as rapidly. The distribution is shown according to the beginning of the scholastic year.
Move from Sulaykh to Zafaranya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Eng.B. Admin.</th>
<th>L. Arts</th>
<th>Jesuits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'56-</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'57-</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'58-</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'59-</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'60-</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'61-</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'62-</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'63-</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'64-</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'65-</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'66-</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'67-</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'68-</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from some Jewish students Al-Hikma's population was about half Christian and half Muslim. Here follows Al-Hikma University Enrollment Statistics for all four years according to Religion: (data for years '58-, '65- and '66- were not available). It illustrates the growth of the student body over the years distributed according to: {Catholic rite} and [Religion].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chal</th>
<th>Syr</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>Gr</th>
<th>Lat</th>
<th>AO</th>
<th>Oo</th>
<th>Mus</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>Tot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'56-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'57-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'58-</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'59-</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'60-</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'61-</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'62-</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'63-</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'64-</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'65-</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:  {Catholic rite} and [Religion]: Tot = total number.
{Chaldean, Syrian, Armenian Catholic, Greek Catholic, Latin}
[Armenian Orthodox, Other Orthodox, Muslims and Jews]
Co-education
The issue of co-education was given much consideration. An illustration of how serious a step Jesuits considered it is reflected in a 1955 questionnaire circulated among the Jesuits, just a few months before Al-Hikma started. Their answers are not available in the archives, but the fact is that Al-Hikma became co-educational long before other Jesuit schools (9/62).

1. Does Iraq need of Catholic higher education for women?
2. In Iraq is there a lack of this for women?
3. If so, should we accept women students?
4. Would coed be acceptable to local hierarchy?
5. Would the Ministry of Education expect it?
6. Should we provide a course more appealing to women?
7. Can we handle problems of inter-student relations?
8. Start coeducation now or later?
9. Do you favor meeting the problem the first year?
   (Al-Hikma Questionnaire on Coeducation,
   12/2/55, Province Archives #510)

A game of tawli (backgammon)

Al-Hikma quickly attained a certain academic, moral and social stature which made it a positive influence for good in many ways. It enjoyed a high reputation in both governmental and non-governmental circles, for academic excellence, integrity, and service. If this were not so, Al-Hikma would not have survived the situation which resulted from the June 1967 war between Israel and the Arab states. At that time emotions ran high and a singularly bitter wave of anti-American feeling swept the Arab world and filled the Arab
media. Because of American support of Israel, Al-Hikma became the special object of attack by certain "concerned" writers in some of the Baghdad Arabic newspapers, and was accused of being an enemy of the Arabs and a nest of spies and agents of the CIA. The Iraqi Government was called upon to take over Al-Hikma and Baghdad College. Throughout that anxious summer Al-Hikma enjoyed the support and encouragement of many friends among responsible Iraqis in official as well as unofficial quarters. Applicants for registration were as numerous as ever, and in fact Al-Hikma began the 1967 academic year with a substantial enrollment increase with 66 students over the previous year.
The curricula of Al-Hikma's three schools

Some of the alumni wrote of their opinion concerning the Al-Hikma curricula and their appreciation for what they learned in the programs of studies.

The only graduation I attended was my own in 1966 at Al-Hikma. All the Jesuits present were at the back of the audience, applauding as each one received his/her diploma. The President of Iraq, on presenting me my diploma, kept shaking my hand for quite a while, and the more the Jesuits and the audience applauded, the more he tightened the hand-shake. It was rather embarrassing. Yet it made me feel wonderful, as a token of appreciation for my being dedicated to God, to the University which had been so generous to me and to the Iraqi people I loved and still love. I was the first religious woman to receive a Degree at Al-Hikma. The following year a Chaldean and then a Dominican sister, each of a different all-Iraqi Congregation - attended Al-Hikma and graduated the last year of the Jesuits' presence in Baghdad. (Sister Joseph Pelletier, A.H. '66)

For two years I have been in charge of the design of the mobile barriers foreseen to defend the city of Venice (Italy) and its hinterland from high tides and storm surges, a multi billion dollar project. Occasionally in meetings or conferences, someone asks "how come an ex-Iraqi is in charge of such an important project?". The conversation usually ends up not by referring to my postgraduate work at Berkeley but by someone saying "mind you he is a Jesuit boy". (Yuill Eprim, B.C. '57, A.H. '61)

Business Administration

The aim of the business administration curriculum was to combine liberal subjects, basic business and economic studies and specialization in the professional training of prospective business executives. The course list for 1966 is found in Appendix D.

The curriculum was not considered a substitute for actual business experience nor an educational shortcut to lucrative administrative positions. The graduate was not expected to enter immediately into the realm of top management, but was expected to be able, as a well educated person, to move forward in business with greater rapidity and assurance than one of equal personal talents who had not received such training.
Studies in Arabic and English aim at the progressive development of the students' ability to express themselves in clear and accurate language. The progressive refinement of the student's sensibility, intelligence and conscience through contact with great ideas which were revealed in poems, plays, novels, biographies and other literary forms which embody the experience of mankind. A study of the social sciences, particularly economics, history and sociology, should provide the student with intellectual perspective and balance by showing the interplay of the various forces, social, economic, and philosophic, that have helped shape the affairs of man in the past and present. The study of philosophy leads the students into the realm of analysis and speculative thought and provides them with the principles and norms by which they can find order and meaning in the world in which they live. (Al-Hikma General Catalog, 1965, p. 35)

*Fr. Guay's strength of materials lab*

**Engineering**

Al-Hikma housed no less than eight science laboratories: a Chemistry laboratory, a soil laboratory, an hydraulic laboratory, a materials laboratory, a drawing laboratory, a surveying laboratory and two physics laboratories.

The curriculum in civil engineering aims at training professionally, students who have the ambition and qualifications for engineering work that requires a thorough grounding in pure science and the engineering sciences, or for advanced studies in civil engineering. The curriculum in civil engineering is in line with the latest thought in engineering education, which emphasize the basic sciences of physics, mathematics, and chemistry, as well as the fundamental
engineering sciences. With the advancement of technology, even new instruments and machines are constantly being replaced by newer and better ones.
(Al-Hikma General Catalog, 1965, p. 38)

Liberal Arts
Studies in Arabic and English aim at the progressive development of the students' ability to express themselves in clear and accurate language as well as the progressive refinement of the student's sensibility, intelligence and conscience through contact with the great ideas which are revealed in poems, plays, novels, biographies and other literary forms which embody the experience of mankind. A study of the social sciences, particularly economics, history and sociology, provides the student with intellectual perspective and balance by showing the interplay of the various forces, social, economic, and philosophic, that have helped shape the affairs of men in the past and present. The study of philosophy leads the students into the realm of speculative thought and provides them with the principles and norms by which they can find meaning in the world in which they live. From the study of theology, students receive a knowledge of the solution provided by God's revelation to the problems of human existence.
(Al-Hikma General Catalog, 1965, p. 42)

Finances of Al-Hikma
Al-Hikma financial history was much simpler than that of today's universities because there were fewer complicated costs such as computer networks, recreation centers and media equipment and also there were fewer sources of revenue. The figures must appear absurdly low to a modern school treasurer, but in the fifties it was possible to buy much more with a dinar (or even with a dollar) especially in Iraq. The annual living expenses for 7 Jesuits computed to 2,977 ID is an example of meager sustenance. One can get an idea of the first four years (1956-1960) from the following table. The figures are in Iraqi Dinars with an exchange rate of 1 ID = $2.80.
Programs at Al-Hikma

At University convocations honor certificates were awarded to the highest ranking students of the previous semester and also for progress in scholarship, leadership, and for general contribution to the University. Student life in the University included academic, social and religious activities which develop and supplement the formal studies. Initiative and cooperation on the part of the students under faculty direction not only contributed generally to the student welfare, but developed in participants that rounded training which would be of great advantage in later life.

Scholarly programs

Many intellectual movements were stirring at Al-Hikma as at most universities and frequently they go unnoticed: for instance the fact that in the Summer of 1967 Fr. Campbell was appointed to the Pro-Nuncio’s Committee for the Study of Islam. Also the programs for faculty development were taking shape and plans were being made for promising young Baghdad College graduates to get higher degrees so that they could take their place teaching at Al-Hikma. Scientific research was constantly increasing, although some of it may appear slightly overstated.

I think Baghdad College and Al-Hikma were among the first Institutions in the world to conduct scientific experiments on the use of solar energy. Both Baghdad College and Al-Hikma had free hot water all the time. (Waiel Hindo)

From the beginning Al-Hikma was careful to build up its library. The Al-Hikma University Library, begun in 1956, at
present contains approximately 35,000 volumes housed in
the spacious new library building that can accommodate
more than 200,000 volumes. The Library has
subscriptions to more than 150 periodicals. It contains a
selection of reference works and a good concentration of
books in business and science. The University has access
by inter-library loan to the 30,000 books of the Jesuit
Library of Baghdad College.

One of the features of the Al-Hikma Library is the famous
Yaqub Sarkis Collection, comprising more than 4,500
valuable books and manuscripts on the history, geography,
and monuments of the area now known as Iraq. The period
covered by the collection extends from the seventeenth to
the twentieth century. This collection, which has long been
known as one of the best private collections in Iraq, was
given to the University by the family of the late Yaqub N.
Serkis, who devoted more than half a century to building it
up. (Al-Hikma General Catalog, 1965)

The Philosophy Discussion Group aimed to provide the students
with an opportunity to express their opinions on philosophical
questions of special interest. At each of the weekly meetings, one
member of the group read a short paper on a chosen subject,
setting forth issues to be discussed and proposing his tentative
answer. This was followed by a free informal discussion in which
other members expressed their opinions on the subject under
discussion.

Fr. O’Connor’s Regis discussion group

The Science Club gave students opportunities to develop special
projects and hear lectures on topics of interest, while the
Mathematics Club provided an opportunity for those students who
had a special interest in mathematics to delve deeper into some of
the fascinating problems of pure and applied mathematics.
The Dramatic Society offered opportunities to those who were interested in the appreciation and study of dramatic pieces. As opportunity and the available facilities allow, dramatic works were presented by the students on a modest scale. The Debating Societies were dedicated to giving the student opportunity to develop facility in oral expression. Topics of student interest were discussed and debated by these student academies.

The Music Appreciation group was made up of the students interested in studying and hearing classical music. The group usually met once a week to hear a selected program of works, and also encouraged attendance at the concerts that were sometimes held in Baghdad.

In 1961 the student literary magazine Al- Jamii began which gave students an opportunity to try out their writing skills in either language, Arabic or English. The very first issue featured a short story by Iraj Ishaq, Bassam Anastas' article on pre-stressed concrete, drawings and cartoons by Shibib Halabu and an interview with President Banks, S.J. by Thamir al-Gailani and Yuil Sarkis.

The Spiritual programs
Al-Hikma became a favorite place for Jesuits to make their annual eight day retreat. In fact, Fr. Bennett from Baghdad College found the secret of surviving short wars in the Near East with little consternation. He would start his retreat a day before war broke out, then he managed to finish just after a cease-fire was declared, thereby avoiding all the tensions of war, and hiding away at the same time. At Al-Hikma, where he made his retreat close to the airfield, all had been warned to stay off the university roofs.

The Sodality
The Sodality, the leading spiritual organization for Catholics, was composed of those students who sought first the personal sanctification of their own lives and secondly active participation in apostolic work. The activities, carried out under the patronage of Our Lady, were spiritual, intellectual, social and apostolic.

During the summer months, Fr. Kelly's Al-Hikma Sodality took
no vacation from their spiritual activities. For example, one of their projects during the summer of 1965 was the painting of a small Chaldean church in the city. The pastor provided the paint, and the Sodalists finished the job in one week. They also tutored poor Christian students who had the status of "conditioned" in their studies and were preparing for new exams. The Sodalists conducted a weekly collection for the poor families of the city. (N.E. Province News, July/Aug., '67 p. 19)

The League of the Sacred Heart

The League of the Sacred Heart and the Apostleship of Prayer were devotions for Catholic students which aim at fostering devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The First Friday of the month was set aside for special services. The Catholic Woman's Club, open to all Catholic women students of Al-Hikma, sought to further the personal sanctification of its members and to develop in them an apostolic spirit, through various activities that are of a spiritual, intellectual and social import.

The Social programs

The cafeteria was central for many of the social gatherings during the semester, but it was not meant only for students and the faculty. During the summer Fr. O'Kane would run a special dinner in the school cafeteria for the 170 workmen and their families. Also the indefatigable Fr. Guay would invite his orphan children, 120 at a time. They played games, attended a movie, received individual gifts, and were given a banquet in the brightly decorated cafeteria. The Sisters and the girls in the Liberal Arts course chaperoned them. Organized student social programs were also in evidence.

The Photography Club members had manifested a serious interest in the art of taking photographs and in the technique of developing pictures. The club also helped to provide a photographic record of the various activities of the University.

The Student Union

Student Union got its impetus during the academic year 1958. Already a Student Council was active at Al-Hikma but this was superseded by the Student Union whose members were elected on 11/22/58 after a 11/4/58 decree of the Council of Ministers establishing the General Student Union of all Iraqi students throughout the country. It called for the formation of Student Unions in individual schools and colleges. Thus the Student Union Committee in Al-Hikma University took part in the work of the Preparatory Committee, the Student Union Convention and the
Student Union Central Committee.

The aim of the Union, according to the decree of the Council of Ministers, was to have the students fulfill their obligations in the service of the Republic, apart from any specific political party, and to be organized for cultural and social activities. The world of the Student Union Committee, as defined by the decision of the Council of Education of the Ministry of Education, was to cooperate with the administration, in accordance with its laws and regulations, in organizing athletic, cultural and social activities. (Al-Hikma General Catalog, 1960)

The Athletic program

Since many students were accustomed to the Jesuit emphasis on athletic events at Baghdad College it was not difficult to field a team for any of the usual sports events such as football, basketball, softball and volleyball. The latter was more popular than the rest since it was a game that the women could play while preserving their dignity. Though the intensity of gamesmanship was less than at Baghdad College there was still plenty of enthusiasm. Frs. Ilbach, Kelley and McDonough were often visible coaching or playing these sports with the students. Fr. McDonough was in charge of the intramural leagues of all sports. The inter-collegiate league was also laid back and a loss was taken with equanimity, not to mention a tie. "The largest crowd to watch an athletic event at Al-Hikma saw our football team fight to a draw, 0-0, with Mosul University."
(Waieel Hindo, B.C. '60, A.H. '64)

Visiting dignitaries

We were honored to have Pedro Arrupe, S.J., the 28th Superior General of the Jesuits visit his fellow Jesuits at Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University on December 21-22, 1965. He had the remarkable ability to sleep when he wished, so his 26 hours there were spent very effectively, holding five major meetings and sleeping in whatever vehicle drove him from one location to
another. Although he met all 60 Jesuits in this short space of time, he should have been tired, but scarcely showed it; he walked with a brisk step and greeted people easily and warmly. During the first part of the evening he sat with a group and talked informally. Later, he stood up and spoke to all the Jesuits briefly but inspiring on a wide range of subjects that touch Jesuits closely. He spoke about the Church, the Vatican Council II, the Holy Father, and about the work of the Jesuit Society in connection with each of these. He threw light on the difficulties that arose about his intervention in the Council on the subject of atheism. He placed special emphasis on the primary importance of the work of the Society in carrying out the decrees of the Vatican Council. The circumstances of Fr. General's talk, his manner of speaking, the topics themselves - all combined to make the meeting impressive and memorable.

The next morning, Fr. Arrupe addressed all the Al-Hikma Jesuits in the recreation room, speaking chiefly about the first session of the General Congregation. In answer to questions he touched on the study of Arabic and on the factors to be considered in making a possible choice of an oriental rite. After concelebrated Mass all the Jesuits from both houses attended an informal buffet at Baghdad College. The General began by chatting with the small group at his table. But as the meal proceeded the group around his table grew larger and larger as he spoke chiefly about his experiences in Japan, which gave all an insight into his ideas on adaptation and his optimism in the apostolate. He left in the afternoon on an Iraqi Airways Trident, piloted by Joseph
Yonan, a Baghdad College graduate enroute to Beirut and thence to Cairo and Ethiopia.

A meeting of educators from the Arab countries met in Baghdad, under UNESCO sponsorship. Many of the delegates visited Al-Hikma, including the Presidents of Universities in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Jordan and Libya.

The Al-Hikma grounds were very attractive thanks to Fr. Loefflter and his assistants and it was frequently visited by Baghdad visitors who had a common interest in higher education. During the Fall of 1962 for example Baghdad celebrated the 1100th anniversary of the death of Al-Kindi, the Arab philosopher. Naturally Fr. McCarthy was involved, appointed by the Ministry of Guidance to the Committee of Publications. With frequent appearances on TV he attended the dawn-to-dusk activities for the whole week. Many of the visitors from all over the world found their way to the Al-Hikma campus. For instance, the visitors included Fr. Alban de Jerphanion, Rector of St. Joseph University in Beirut, Fr. Felix Pareja, Jesuit Orientalist from Madrid, Dr. Abel of Holland, Mlle. Simone van Riet of the University of Louvain, Mr. Abdul Wahab Dokori of Mali, Dr. Gabrieli of the University of Rome; Mlle. Maria Nallino, editor of Oriente Moderno and Dr. Fuad Bustani, President of the University of Lebanon. Fr. Paul Nwyia, of the Vice Province of the Middle East, who has been working with Chaldean monks in the north of Iraq, joined the community for a short time. (N.E. Province News, Oct. ‘62, p.18)

At other times visitors came for no particular occasion but merely to experience this "oasis of learning". The Belgian Ambassador and Mrs. Marcel Dupret, Mr. Paul Jones of the Philadelphia Bulletin and Fr. John Huesman (California) were among the guests. (N.E. Province News, May/June ’67 p. 17)

The President of the Republic of Iraq, Field Marshall Abdul-Salam Muhammad Arif, presided at the Fifth Annual Commencement of Al-Hikma University of Baghdad on June 9, 1964 at the University Campus. Also present were the Prime Minister, Gen. Tahir Yahya; the Minister of Education, Dr. Muhammad Nasir; the Minister of the Interior and Military Governor General, Brig. Rashid Musleh; and the Minister of Municipal and Village Affairs, Major General Mahmud Sheet Khattab. Among others present were the President of Baghdad University, and the Vice President; the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education; Deans of the various colleges of Baghdad University; the Governor of Baghdad. Among the religious leaders
present were: the Apostolic Delegate, the Chaldean Patriarch, the Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Baghdad, the Armenian Catholic Archbishop of Baghdad, the Head of the Greek Catholic Community, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Baghdad, the Head of the Armenian Orthodox Community, the Religious Head of the Jewish Community, two Chaldean Bishops, and practically all the clergy of Baghdad, as well as the Sisters of the Chaldean, Dominican, Presentation, Armenian and de Foucauld Congregations. The audience attending the ceremony in the University Gardens totaled about 2,000.

The welcoming and inviting oasis

These chronicles of Al-Hikma which covered the 12 years from 1956 to 1968 briefly described a campus so vibrant that it was referred to as an oasis on the outskirts of Baghdad on the edge of the desert. It not only resembled an oasis because of its beautiful gardens and buildings but it was a place of intellectual and spiritual refreshment. It was a place that nurtured scholarship and made learning quite accessible. Most of all it was a place of varied and lively activities; intellectual, spiritual, athletic and social which attracted many visitors as well many students who wished to study, play and grow there. Its popularity was evident from the steadily increasing enrollment and amazingly rapid growth.