Chapter 8

Personalities Who Shaped Baghdad College and Al-Hikma

*What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!
  how infinite in faculty! in action how like an angel!
  in apprehension how like a god!*


Campus characters

The first four young Jesuits to arrive in Baghdad in 1932 as well as their successors were energetic, intelligent and fun loving and so were the young Iraqis they came to instruct. The most interesting aspect of the two Jesuit schools involved the fascinating characters who taught and learned there. One of the alumni describes some of his teachers who, he claimed, "would send him into orbit".

The small booklet of Aesop's Fables was the introduction for many of us to the Jesuits. We were told to read Aesop's Fables in preparation for the admission interview with Fr. Thomas Kelly of Baghdad College. After this interview I thought this is one tough priest, but then I met Fr. Decker who specialized in making 12-year old boys into men of quality and discipline. During that first year at Baghdad College when my father was
asked by his friends: where I was going to school he would answer; "with the Jesuits". Their inevitable reply would be: They are good at teaching discipline. At the age of 12 I did not know what the word meant and cataloged it as something important that grownups have. That was 40 years ago. Little did I know that one day I would have three children to tell that we had discipline before going to college.

In the later years of my career and my community life, I often pondered the origin of the forces that launched us into success. Every year we had new teachers who provided the booster power to guide us into discipline. Mathematics taught by Fr. MacDonnell, English grammar by Fr. Jolson. A fine of 50 fils from Fr. Fennel for exploding hydrogen in a chemistry test-tube. Cell biology and genetics from Frs. Gerry and Owens. A powerful booster for personal ethics and religion was Fr. LaBran. Middle Eastern history came from Ustach George Abbosh. Neither Fr. Quinn's encouragement in sports nor Fr. Sullivan's urging me to engage in public speaking were as memorable as the booster rockets of discussions with Fr. Taft about Tolstoy and the Russian psyche and religions. When all failed, there was the dreaded specter of detention after class and taking the public bus home.

And so, we rocketed through five years of controlled trajectory to escape into individual free orbits. We discovered that there was much more to life than we expected and we were prepared with discipline - that "grownup" word again. Our time with the Baghdad Jesuits was a rite of passage. I can hear them whispering "Our Baghdad boys are men of quality". (Allen Svoboda, B.C. '58)

Another earlier graduate states this appreciation more briefly. "What influence some Baghdad Jesuits had on me? In the process of my growth and development as a youth, they emphasized the highest spiritual, scholastic and temporal ideals. Those ideals conceived and applied in yesteryear are today still bearing fruit in my everyday life." (Ed Zoma, B.C. '37) In that spirit this chapter gives more details of some of the faculty, both Jesuit and lay, who taught at the two schools and who were often mentioned by the alumni. The names are arranged in alphabetical order and rely on information sent in by alumni and Jesuits who responded to a request for such information. This latter fact may explain why some "personalities" are missing; its just that no respondents mentioned them.
Mr. George Abbosh who earlier in his life had been a Jesuit seminarian in the Middle East vice-province. After leaving the Jesuits he began teaching at Baghdad College the very first year of its existence in 1932 and continued until its last in 1969. He was a pillar of the school, devoted to his students, fellow teachers and to the Fathers with a warmth and dedication that could not fail to impress anyone who met him. He had a politeness and courtesy that were charming, arising out of the depth of his being. If the Fathers had questions about decisions they had to make Mr. George Abbosh was a wise and prudent counselor. (Fr. Ryan)

Part of the 1936 faculty

Fr. Francis Anderson was born 6/4/00 and worked in Baghdad from 1936-40, and 1947. He was my 4th year English teacher and also a Shakespeare drama scholar and an actor. Because of his influence, today I am active in the local Columbia College drama department and have played character roles in 15 Columbia Actors Repertory productions on the historic Fallon House Theater. (Edward Zoma, B.C. '37)

In those pre-television days the community recreation room after meals was the scene of many a roaring argument between verbal warriors like Fr. Madaras and Fr. Anderson. When one of these warriors, weary of the battle would say: "I rest my case," the other would reply: "It needs a rest!" Since the recreation room was the library, there was a huge Funk and Wagnalls dictionary and an encyclopedia which were handy to settle the arguments. Later Fr. Anderson became the Director of the Jesuit Mission Bureau in Boston. (Fr. Fennell)

Mr. Bashir Khudhary taught Arabic through the forties until 1952. He was also the Arabic teacher for the Fathers. I was approached by Mr. Bashir to tutor him in basic mathematics. This I did by visiting him weekly at his home for
several months. During those private visits our roles were reversed; he the student and I the teacher which was embarrassing and confusing for a 14 year old boy. Surprisingly and happily, however, this temporary role reversal had no effect on our respective roles in school. When I look back at this stage in my life, I cannot help but sense the humor and innocence of those events.

(Elwin G. Kennedy, B.C. '42)

Fr. Robert B. Campbell was born 5/26/26 and worked in Baghdad from 1951-54, and 1962-69. After ordination he studied at Harvard where he earned a Master's degree in Middle East studies. He returned to Al-Hikma until the expulsion, after which he obtained his Ph.D. in Arabic literature from the University of Michigan.

As a teacher at Al-Hikma, Fr. Campbell was special. Although he knew math and physics, his great interest was in teaching students to think in areas of philosophy and (for Christian students) theology. For many students this was a new and very formative experience. They were used to studying the sciences, engineering or business administration. To be challenged to consider their values and to defend them not emotionally but rationally was something different, something deeper, to understand who you are and why. It was a challenge which many students later looked back on as a new and important stage of their adult growth. (Fr. Ryan)

Fr. Edward Coffey was born in 1897 and worked in Baghdad from 1932-35. With characteristic energy and enthusiasm he coached and encouraged the Baghdad College soccer team as it competed with other high schools. Because of my steady participation in this popular game under his guidance and supervision, today at 76 I am a long distance runner averaging 5 or more miles a day 4 days a week and have been coaching a local running club for the past 13 years.

(Edward Zoma, B.C. '37)

Fr. Joseph Connell was born 8/20/08 in Brockton, MA. and worked in Baghdad during the years 1935-36,44-53, 55-61,64-69. He was the mudeer (principal) from 1943 to 1952, during many of the expanding years. He was very well known among the alumni and in fact organized the first Al-Hikma reunion of graduates which took place in Baghdad in November of 1964. He came to Baghdad in 1936 and was the first Jesuit scholastic to arrive. An inveterate missionary,
he went to Jamaica after his expulsion from Baghdad and there became the principal of the evening school for adult education. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Francis X. Cronin was born 6/29/12 and worked in Baghdad from 1940-43, & 1949-53. He arrived in Baghdad in September 1939, just as World War II started in Europe. He taught chemistry and also was assigned to study Arabic which did with such skill that after his ordination he could deliver short sermons in Arabic in a competent and confident manner. During his time at Baghdad College he won a host of friends and was greatly admired for his charity, humility and devotion to work.

All went well with him until the winter of 1953, when he developed a deep rash and became very ill. After a week, doctors in Baghdad were uncertain of their diagnosis. He was carried west to the British air base at Habbaniyah in the desert, where doctors diagnosed his illness as leukemia. He died a holy death on January 30, 1953 at the air base, and after an extremely long funeral procession on Rashid Street in Baghdad, he was buried behind the church in Sulaih, the first Jesuit to die on the mission. Many students and alumni attended his funeral and Baghdad lost a great preacher. His favorite story was about an elderly Irishman near his home in Connecticut. When asked if he'd like a drink, the Irishman would always reply: "I seldom drink, but when I do, it's usually about this time of the day!" (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. Cronin preaching in Arabic at Padre Pierre's church

Fr. Augustine Devenny was born 10/17/08 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1939-49. He volunteered to help out when Fr. Madras needed a verbal sparring partner during evening recreation. After many a long-winded argument by
Fr. Madaras on some point of theology, Fr. Devenny would say quietly "I accept your apology!" In 1939, on his arrival at the College, he was given the difficult assignment of mudir, with no previous experience of life in Baghdad, or its language, but he did the job with admirable aplomb. (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. Devenny took personal interest over half a century in the affairs and well being of our family and readily gave his advice to me when requested. He visited our humble home in 1939 when I was ill. He paid us a special visit in 1942 to persuade my father to discourage me from leaving school after 3rd year. He was distressed when I had to leave school and to start work due to very poor family financial situation. He impressed upon me the lasting value of education. His influence led me to complete higher education attending evening classes leading to a masters' degree in business from Toronto University. (Elwin G. Kennedy, B.C. '42)

Fr. John J. Donohue was born 1/12/26 in Worcester, MA and worked in Baghdad during the years 1953-56, 66-69. He taught homeroom 4B mathematics and English during his first year in Iraq, then he went to the language house to study Arabic. After ordination he received a doctorate in Arabic Studies at Harvard (on the Buyid Dynasty in Iraq), then returned to Baghdad in 1966 to teach at Al-Hikma. He was made superior of the whole mission in 1967 and threw his impressive energies into that demanding job, encouraging the Jesuits to discuss thoroughly every aspect of their Baghdad work and to plan for the future. After the Iraqi government took over Al-Hikma he spent most of his waking hours trying to convince members of the government (at all levels) that expulsion of the Jesuits was neither deserved nor in the best interest of the Iraqi people. The government, however, had other preoccupations, especially that of maintaining itself in power. The Jesuits were expendable.
Fr. Donohue’s name was on the list of those to be expelled 25 November, 1968 so he protested that he should be allowed to stay since he was the superior of all the Jesuits. Government officials concurred and he was able to stay until the expulsion of the Baghdad College Jesuits was complete in August 1969. (Fr. MacDonnell)

The B.C. Community in 1956

Fr. Joseph Fennell was born 3/23/11 in Springfield, MA. and worked in Baghdad during the years 1939-43, 50-69. During all this time he taught chemistry and is remembered in connection with his lab experiments. He had a naturally disciplined way of teaching, steady, predictable focused; and this sense of discipline was formative for his students, although some of them initially found it not in accord with their tastes. Reflecting on this quality, one of his students told him: "Father, you are good for us Iraqis." He felt he and his friends needed Fr. Fennell’s discipline. Fr. Fennell often recalled this encomium with a warm chuckle.

In studying Arabic, Fr. Fennell applied the same discipline to himself. Knowing that a foreigner could easily provoke an uproar among his students if he used an English word which sounded like an Arabic word with an unsavory implication, Fr. Fennell made up lists of English words to be avoided which he shared with the other Fathers. (Fr. Ryan)

Fr. Stanislaus Gerry was born 3/7/12 in Brockton, MA. and worked in Baghdad during the years 1946-57, 58-69. He taught biology (and theology) at Baghdad College and after his dismissal from Baghdad he went to teach in Campion College Jamaica.

What do bookstore, biology and classical music have in common? Fr. Stanislaus T. Gerry at Baghdad College. Fr. Gerry used to scare the daylights out of me as a freshman every time I walked into the bookstore (for a classic example of such a moment - see a picture of Fr. Gerry in the college of
"First Day of School" in the '68 Al-Iraqi). I used to hate classical music. Then one day, Fr. Gerry asked me to get him a blank reel to reel tape, he recorded a beginners selection for me. Ever since, he got me hooked on Beethoven, Bach and the rest. Today, thanks to Fr. Gerry that man with the "gruff" exterior and soft heart classical music is a lifetime passion for me! How's that for good education. May God bless his soul him and all the "Baghdad" Jesuits everlasting happiness.
(Raad Habib, B.C. '68)

Fr. Vincent Gookin was born 3/1/91 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1935-47. He was a practicing dentist when he changed the course of his life and applied for the Jesuits. He disliked being called "Doc", and refused to do any dental work on the rest of the community. He delighted listeners with softly-played, old-time songs on the piano. When teaching chemistry to the juniors, he would astound the class by writing a sentence on the blackboard with his left hand, then switching the chalk to his right hand, and continue writing the sentence! On one occasion, the class had to do a laboratory experiment making a small amount of chlorine gas. Typical of generous Iraqi youth, they used a too generous proportion of ingredients. As the resulting green poison filled the room and seeped out the windows, the whole class rushed out in front of the school, coughing and rubbing their eyes! The experiment was deemed a success. (Fr. Ryan)

Fr. Guay's last building: the unfinished Oriental Institute /

Fr. Leo Guay was born 3/3/08 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1945-56, 58-68. As the last Jesuit scholastic to teach at Al-Hikma University I always felt blessed to have such fine Jesuit role models because they brought out the scholarly, administrative, missionary and pastoral dimensions of the Jesuit vocation. One such Jesuit was Fr. Leo Guay. I was always struck by this biologically old man who was so full of life and enthusiasm and I wondered about the secret of his success. I think it was because he
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genuinely loved children and had a great rapport with them. His regular routine included frequent visits to the orphanages in Baghdad, and on such occasions he would tell his favorite children's stories and jokes. He seemed to have an endless supply of them. Sheep grazed on the campus lawn to be fattened up for the orphans. When sufficiently plump, off they went to the delighted orphans. If any strayed off the campus, neighbors were kind enough to return them for the orphans.

He was also a self-taught architect who sent away for books on architecture when he first came to Baghdad College. His skills were quite developed by the time he got to Al-Hikma University and each new building seemed even better than the previous one. His last unfinished building was the Oriental Institute. It had a distinctively Arab and Middle Eastern flavor, and when the beautiful blue dome was finished it had a startlingly beautiful optical illusion. As people drove by on the road to Basra it seemed as if an image of a cross reflecting sunlight off the dome followed them as they sped along the road. He used the principle of the geodesic dome which he learned from Buckminster Fuller to construct workmen's housing.

In addition to a nice sense of humor, he had a very scientific mind and was always learning and teaching. He knew the names of many stars and emphasized that often the Arabs had named them. He was not afraid to make mistakes because we usually learn from our mistakes and most successful people have had their share of failures. (Fr. James Spillane)

Fr. Thomas Hussey was born 5/29/09 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1937-40, 44-46, 47-59. 66-69. After Fr. Hussey finished his early teaching years ('37-'40) he went to India to study theology for ordination, since trans-Atlantic travel was too difficult for Americans during the war. When he returned in 1944 he quickly became a very popular teacher of first year students. Then in 1952 he became the superior of the mission until 1958. During these years the expansion of Baghdad College and the extension to Al-Hikma was due in great part to him. He requested land from the Iraqi government and they gave the Jesuits an enormous 168 acres. He requested money from foundations and they also were quite generous. He had asked the prime minister to intercede for the Jesuits with the foundations and he did. Perhaps due to his success in getting needed donations for Baghdad College, he was called to Boston to work in a similar job at the Jesuit Missions office. He returned to Iraq in 1966. Ever since the expulsion he has worked as librarian at the Cathedral Elementary School
in Boston. In 1993 the library was named in his honor when he was honored as a much loved friend and teacher: "... well educated, forever patient and committed to giving the next generation a boost they will not find anywhere else." At the ceremony the children put on a play acting out his life and included a scene of his expulsion from Iraq. (Fr. MacDonnell)

**Fr. Frederick Kelly** was born 12/4/22 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1949-52, 59-68. He taught physics at Baghdad College during his first stint and returned as Dean of Al-Hikma's Engineering school in 1959 and continued at this post until November 1968. Fr. Fred was always doing interesting things, like teaching, preaching, coaching, motivating, counseling, consoling, administering the sacraments and a myriad of other marvelous things.

*Fr. F. Kelly running a physics lab in 1951*

Students called him el-Spanner (spanner wrench) because he could fit into any science course and could teach any mathematics, physics or engineering subject. Whenever a teacher called in sick and the students thought they had a holiday Fr. Fred would show up and take the teacher's place. When asked how he could do this since it required so much habitual knowledge, he confided with his impish grin: "Its just that I can read faster than the students can."

In a similar way he was called el chibar, the lion, because this kind and gentle man tolerated no nonsense. He faced down armed men who came onto the campus to disrupt classes at the beginning of the 1968 Fall semester. A while later when the decree of dismissal arrived, listing 8 Jesuit names to be dismissed from the country, two of the names listed referred to Fr. Kelly: Frederick William Kelly and Kelly Frederick William. Mystified by American organization of names and surnames the authorities were not sure what el chibar's name was but it was clear that they wanted to get this tough
adversary out of their hair.

The most common Arabic nick-name was Amu-Fred - uncle Fred - and this was the title that meant the most to him and to his fellow Jesuits. It was a term of endearment and respect which his Jesuit friends still use. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Thomas Kelly was born 4/18/12 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1945-55, 56-69. Fr. Kelly was a skilled disciplinarian which job he filled at Baghdad College for many years and his favorite saying seemed to be "Let the punishment fit the crime." Of many examples one stands out. A lad was carving his name on a date tree, perhaps thinking who is going to mind since there were over 200 date trees on the campus. Fr. Kelly minded and had him stay after school until he had memorized the poem "Woodsman Spare that Tree".

Occasionally he would have a tough case and call the student's father. One such time he sent a boy home for the harmless prank of approaching another from behind and poking them in the leg causing them to lose their balance and fall over. All they lost was their dignity. When the father arrived with his son in tow, it was clear that he was not in a mood for jokes and when the poor lad was told to demonstrate on his father what he was doing he pleaded: "He'll kill me." It seemed that Fr. Kelly believed the boy since he dismissed the case on the spot and never called the father again. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Joseph LaBran was born 8/19/15 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1949-58. In his literature courses Fr. LaBran had his students memorize many passages not only to help them appreciate the author at the time but to store away passages that they would savor later in life. He accomplished both. At the biennial reunions, even before saying hello, his former students approach him reciting passages from Shakespeare's plays or Tennyson's idylls of the King which they have treasured for 40 years. Fr. LaBran was very proud of the fact that during his visit to Baghdad College King Faisal lingered longer in his literature class than in any of the other classes. Students recited their assigned memory from Julius Caesar. "He would be king, that he might change
his nation". Three months later King Faisal was dead.

One of the summers I visited the Jesuit house in Saadun where Father LaBran was staying and I met some of his Sodalists. It took true dedication for Fr. LaBran to live at the place and under such primitive conditions. Once he was bitten by a wild dog and had to be taken to the hospital for stitches and rabies shots. Fr. LaBran came in to tell me that they had an alcoholic living alone and in a hallucinated state. He got him to the house and had his Sodalists taking turns watching the man. The boys were frightened facing such a situation for the first time, but I encouraged them. After Fr. LaBran had convinced him to receive the sacraments he died peacefully.

My father-in-law who was vice president of the high court of Iraq had a stroke and was in a coma at the hospital. During martial law following a revolution Father LaBran was with us and was a great support. He gave the last blessings and was the only friend who came to our home at this time of our sorrow. At the time there was a very dangerous atmosphere in Baghdad, with the city reserve oil tanks on fire. He got home safely but Fr. LaBran gave the Holy Spirit a difficult time.

When Fr. LaBran had to leave us to go back to the States we had broken hearts and missed him very much. His dedication and service to the people of Iraq can never be forgotten. For us he was the new 20th century St. Paul spreading the word of God. He did great good with his great heart and simple ways open with charity to all. We pray that our future church will be blessed by men like him to spread the love and faith that conquers the world. (Augustine Shamas)

Fr. James P. Larkin was born 2/15/10 and worked in Baghdad from 1944-54, 57-69. He was tall, stocky and in fine physical condition. When students at Baghdad College learned that he had been a boxer, they were not surprised since he looked the part. But big as he was, he was a gentle person, very fond of his students. Some of them were courageous enough to take boxing lessons from him. When Fr. James' younger brother William, the physicist, arrived in Baghdad they were naturally named Big Larkin and Small Larkin. Fr. James' interest in photography resulted in some of the best pictures of Baghdad College and Al-Hikma, many of which are shown in these pages due to the kindness of his sister Helen who owns them. When he was taking the photographs he was anxious about every detail so his photos were outstanding. (Fr. Ryan)
Fr. Charles M. Loeffler was born 2/19/12 in Mattapan, MA. and worked in Baghdad during the years 1943-50, 51-61, 62-69. He taught French at Holy Cross and, after ordination in 1941, he taught English, math, and theology at Baghdad College until the expulsion of 1969, and then he did pastoral work in the south end of Boston until retirement in 1992. He loved to help keep up the Baghdad College grounds and was known for his cheerful and wry humor. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Joseph MacDonnell was born 5/4/29 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1955-58, 64-69. During June after his first year of teaching he gathered together ten of his Christian students and gave them a three-day closed retreat. It was so successful that during the next two years he gave four more of these retreats. Later in the sixties he took charge of the retreat program which grew rapidly so that by 1968 no less than 15 closed retreats were held, one of which accommodated 48 alumni. In Detroit, at the request of the alumni, he revived the retreat movement because of the insistence of the alumni and initiated the very meaningful retreats and days of recollection now held at the Manresa Retreat House in Bloomfield.

Fr. MacDonnell sometimes filled in for teachers who fell ill. His good friend Alfred Nasri was overtaken by an extended two month sickness and Fr. MacDonnell went to the mudir to point out that students needed that instruction for their third year government exam so he would take all seven physics classes whenever he had a free period in his own schedule. For two months he taught each of the seven periods each day and his students did quite well in their government exam. (Fr. Ryan)

Fr. Sidney MacNeil was born 9/14/09 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1937-39, 43-56, 57-69. He was one of the pillars of Baghdad College, and much later at Al-Hikma. He seemed to know everyone and all the members of their families. More important, he always was available and happy that people would ask his advice or his help. For those
who, on graduating from Baghdad College, were desirous of going on to further studies abroad, he was particularly encouraging. He had a very positive attitude, noticing the good qualities in students. Jesuits used to joke with him about his enthusiasm for students who were particularly bright and talented, especially if they were hard workers. He had a list of the 10 best students as well as the best - best and even the best - best - best students. (Fr. Ryan)

Father Sidney MacNeil worked hard and long attempting to obtain academic scholarships for the graduates of Baghdad College. He was frequently successful, as in my own case, and several others of my own class of B.C. '48. To his time consuming and knowledgeable handling of my applications to and communications with various American institutions, and to his continuous patient efforts and counseling, I "owe" having the privilege of attending (tuition-free) two of the most prestigious (and expensive) universities (Yale and Princeton). Father MacNeil, also, looked for and found other ways to help B.C. graduates: as in my case. While waiting for the finalization of his efforts to obtain a scholarship for me (which took a full year) he also managed to arrange to provide me with the opportunity to work at a company.
(Ramzi Hermiz, B.C. '48)

Fr. Edward Madaras was born 1/30/97 in Defiance, Ohio and worked in Baghdad during the years 1932-44, 46-67. Fr. Madaras had been in Baghdad for 35 years doing magnificent work. During which time only once did he return for a few weeks to visit his brothers, Joseph Madaras of Birmingham, Michigan, and Arthur Madaras of Indianapolis, Indiana. He devoted his many and exceptional talents and all his strength to Baghdad College, and is rightly regarded by all as not only the co-founder of the school but also as one of its principal pillars and personalities. For seven years Father was President of the College; and for the other 28 years he labored as administrator, architect, builder and teacher.

For all who knew him Fr. Madaras was surely one who would stand high on any list of "Great Characters I Have Met." It is out of the question in such a brief sketch to do this many-faceted character justice. Two features only can be mentioned. The first was his tireless and amazing industry.

He was a very talented, very exact and very argumentative Jesuit from Defiance, Ohio. During the Community meals Jesuit scholastics took their turns reading to the community while an older Father was assigned to correct their mistakes in
pronunciation. No one ever got away with a mispronunciation when Fr. Madaras was the prefect of reading. He was the type of person who, instead of taking snacks, devoured Webster's dictionary during his spare time.

_Frs. Guay and Madaras_

He brooked no shoddy work either, and once refused to pay a company for 20 chairs he had ordered because they were made of inferior wood from packing cases. He told scholastics: "I am here to train you to do things properly." In later years he was very popular with these scholastics. He taught mathematics classes until the year he died in 1967. He was buried in the cemetery in back of the Baghdad College chapel. (Fr. Fennell)

**Fr. Charles Mahan** was born 3/29/99 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1934-46, 47-57, 58-69. The boarding school near the Tigris River, with mostly Iraqi boarders from Baghdad itself, from Basra in the south and from Mosul in the north, was well-disciplined under the stern command of Fr. Mahan. He also cared for the spiritual well being of his charges and made sure that the Christian boarders went to Mass each morning before breakfast.

He was no one to fool with. One day a young Shaikh named Ahmed of the Shammar tribe in north Iraq confessed: "There are 50,000 Arabs in my tribe afraid of me, and I'm afraid of Fr. Mahan!" Logically, we may assume that made 50,001 Arabs in Iraq afraid of Fr. Mahan (5 ft. 4 in.)! Shaikh Ahmed had 3 younger brothers with him in the boarding school, all crowded together in one room. They brought fearsome-looking handguns and ammunition, which Fr. Mahan locked up in his safe. On Thursday afternoon, on the way to see a movie in Baghdad, they demanded to carry their guns with them. "We have enemies in Baghdad!" Fortunately, they never had to use them: on return from the movie, the guns were locked up for the week. They had a giant body-guard, who was a walking arsenal of weapons! When asked: "Is he your servant?"
Ahmed replied: "No, he is our slave!" (Fr. Fennell)

In the school year 48-49, I was in 2-C with Fr. Mahan. In religion classes Fr. Mahan was fond of telling us not to seek the Cadillac and mansion, that many who become rich tend to acquire, and to be satisfied with the simple pleasures of life. At that time I had no idea what a Cadillac was. But little did I know, that just a few years later, I would be implanted in the city where all the Cadillacs in the world are made. And as fate would have it, I became fast friends with the St. Aubin family, direct descendants of a Lieutenant in the Mission, Captain Siur Antoine DeLaMothe Cadillac. (Saib Shunia, B.C. '52)

Fr. John Mahoney was born 1/2/19 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1945-48, 53-69. In 1946 Fr. Madaras informed Fr. John Mahoney, just finishing his first year in Baghdad, that he would be studying the language full time beginning right away. He was surprised since he never was mistaken for a linguist in any of the languages a Jesuit has to study in his career and besides he enjoyed teaching his freshman section. Fr. Superior said "right away" and he meant it, so he boarded the bus to Karrada to the home of the Arabic teacher Mu'allim Bashir.

The high point of his Arabic career came when he preached a few of the ceremonies in place of the eloquent Fr. Richard McCarthy. That accomplishment was his diploma for Arabic studies in Baghdad even though he claimed that he was just beginning to get the hand of the language and the thinking that goes with it. In his later years he spent much of his time with the families of the Baghdad College workers.

He worried about the children of the men who worked at the college - bus drivers, kitchen workers, and workers in the various residences (about 25 families in all). These children attended school at Jesuit expense, to the Chaldean Sisters' Primary in the center of Baghdad to whom the Jesuits paid tuition and bus transportation. He noticed that their grades were very low and when Fr. Mahoney visited their homes, he could see why. They had no place to study so Fr. Mahoney volunteered to gather the students for a two-hour study period from 5 to 7 five days a week in one of the school classrooms. So the children came in big numbers. On Sundays Fr. Mahoney said Mass for all and had the youngsters sing the appropriate hymns. Quite a few of them were good athletes. This was shown when the girls beat the boys in soccer. The girls beat their brothers and this in front of a group of neighboring Iraqis who were completely amazed. (Fr. MacDonnell)
Fr. Stanley Marrow was born 2/1/31 in Baghdad, Iraq and worked in Baghdad during the years 1955-58, 66-67. He has been mentioned in Chapter 5 in the discussion of Jesuit vocations and the influence Jesuits had. After his graduation in 1947 he became the first Jesuit vocation. He returned to Baghdad College in 1955 to teach chemistry. He surprised his first class of students who expected another American Jesuit. They found that they had to be more circumspect about their language since he was one of them. He enjoyed being with the students and they with him.

After studying theology (1958-62) and being ordained in the Syrian rite he returned once again to Iraq in 1967, this time as a theology teacher at Al-Hikma. After the expulsion Fr. Marrow went to the Weston School of Theology where he still teaches and does scholarly work in the field of New Testament studies. He has authored a few books and gained a wonderful reputation in the field of sacred scripture. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Richard McCarthy was born 3/7/12 in Chicopee, MA. He worked in Baghdad during the years 1938-41, 51-68. Fr. McCarthy became Rector of the University in 1965. He had done graduate studies in Rome and Oxford University in England. An outstanding scholar, he became fluent in Arabic and oriental languages and was an authority on Islamic philosophy and theology. The House of Studies was under his supervision and he was a dedicated teacher of Arabic to his Jesuit colleagues. His sermons in Churches and at public events won wide acclaim and the admiration of his Iraqi friends. He had a dream, and during his term of office he supervised the construction of an Oriental Institute on the campus of Al-Hikma University. The building was a modest endeavor with classrooms, a library, and accommodations for seminars. Here he hoped to draw students and scholars from all over the world to create a better understanding and friendship among those of diverse cultural backgrounds. (Fr. Donohue)

I am sending you, through my uncle Ramzi [Hermiz], two mementos of Fr. Richard McCarthy: a photocopy of a small pamphlet he had written on The Morning Offering and an audio cassette containing a homily he had given on a Holy Friday in the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, located in one of the suburbs of Baghdad [near Baghdad-al-Jadida]. To the best of my estimation, the original undated tape was made in the early sixties. I remember how my father had taken the
comparatively large, and very heavy, recording machine (the old reel type) with us to that church because Fr. McCarthy was celebrating Mass there and how my father wanted to record the homily, and so he did. I ask you to share the cassette and the "pamphlet" with the Fathers who would like to remember their friend and colleague, or with those who would just like to listen to his voice again. You may also want to make copies of the materials to be kept wherever the "permanent records" of the Jesuits' work are kept - if there is such a place. Perhaps, however, the Jesuits as people of God don't care much for permanent "records" as such, but believe mainly in the records of their work that are left in the hearts and minds of the people whose lives they touch. [Ed. Jesuits are incorrigible record keepers.] (This is a letter to Fr. Campbell from Su'dad N. Sesi, graduate of Al-Hikma and niece of Ramzi Hermiz.)

**Fr. Leo McDonough** was born 7/25/23 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1948-51, 59-68. Fr. "Chet" McDonough taught first at B.C. and later at A.H. after doing graduate studies in mathematics at Catholic University. He was also director of athletics, Dean of Students and Dean of the School of Business Administration. He was very much at home with people and had a wonderful sense of humor. A stranger, upon meeting him, felt at ease immediately. He had a uncanny knack of reading a person's mood. In talking with a student, he could quickly surmise if something was bothering the student. This empathy with a person's feelings applied to groups as well. At certain times of the year he would tell the dean:

"Everyone is ready for a party. What do you say?" In difficult circumstances, especially when the politics of the country made its presence felt on the campus, he was quick to notice and quick to take action. He was then an ideal Dean of Students.

If a person was in trouble, whether it be someone on campus or a complete stranger, they were lucky to run into Fr. McDonough. One can still picture him taking students out of
the city by bus for a picnic. He would clap his hands merrily while students sang to the accompaniment of the beat of the dymbuk. Or when at a party he would stroll around playing his accordion. (Fr. Ryan)

Fr. Joseph Merrick was born 8/13/1895 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1933-69. He was the ultimate missionary. On a hot summer afternoon, 120 degrees in the shade, while most of the citizens were napping I went out to visit the family of one of my students and congratulated myself on my selflessness. At that moment Fr. Merrick got off the bus. He had been out in the worst of the heat visiting the poor and was just now coming home. (Mr. Michael Toner)

Jesuits have always been my best friends throughout my 30 years of teaching at a girls’ school, directed by our Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation, and called "Presentation School", situated at Bab-el-Shargy, Baghdad, Iraq, in the central part of the city where all city events (good and bad) converged. Without the Jesuits’ spiritual and material support, I wondered how I could have surmounted all the disappointments, hardships and discouragement which I had to endure. I would often see and talk with Fr. Merrick who used to celebrate Mass at our convent on most every Sunday for several years. After his Sunday Mass, I would serve him breakfast in the sacristy. There was no American food but there was always butter and cheese. This cheese was wrapped in foil or wax-paper. After the meal, in cleaning up, I often noticed that the two or three triangular pieces were gone, but so was their wrapper. I later learned that he had stuck them into his pocket to give to the poor he met on his way home to Baghdad College - a 40 minute walk. (Sister Joseph Pelletier, A.H. '66)

Fr. Merrick taught me by his words and deeds of kindness how to care for the needs of the poor and suffering. Many a time he took me with him to the “Armenian Camp” outside of Baghdad - a camp for Armenian war refugees from the turn of the century - to visit and to instruct in catechism. Today, because of his influence and example, I serve as a deacon at All Saints Parish in the foothills town of Twain Harte. I was ordained in the Chaldean rite in 1973 by the late Patriarch Paul Sheikho at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Turlock, California. (Edward Thomas Zoma)

One day, after school, I sat on a bench astride the field and watched Fr. Merrick as he stood motionless in the field, as if transfixed in one spot, in deep meditation. This lasted what
seemed to me then like an eternity. Little did I know that he was reaching for the hand of God. (Saib Shunia, B.C. '52)

When Fr. Merrick was attempting to visit a sick person at the Dar Es Salam Adventist Hospital he was stopped near the front door and told all the patients' spiritual needs were taken care of; there was no need for him to visit there. He replied as long as there was a patient in the hospital whom he knew about he would visit as often as he felt needed and no one on the staff would ever prevent him. (Br. Foley)

The New York Times carried an enthusiastic article recently concerning Andrew Wiles' proof of Fermat's last theorem on the 60th anniversary of another article (N.Y. Times 7/4/33) concerning Fr. Joseph Merrick's proof of the same theorem. Fr. Merrick was justifiably more modest "it is unlikely that I have succeeded since so many have tried - but where is the mistake?" His modesty was on target, because he had made a mistake and failed to prove it. But Fr. Merrick was a recidivist, he kept trying and could not let go of this elusive problem. He would corner all mathematics teachers who understood how mathematics works so that they would go over his revision of the flawed proof. They all gradually came to hate Mr. Fermat and his theorem. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Merrick was a religious who made do with little sleep. But he did fall asleep between his physics classes! He was known far and wide to be Father Deaf, although that was not the reason for his popularity as a confessor. He was kind, understanding, with great love of the poor. He opened a little office on Rashid St., where people could drop in for free counseling. He ended his days, well over 90 years, in the Campion Health Center in Weston, MA. (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. John A. Mifsud was born 12/7/1895 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1932-46, 47-64. The earliest Jesuits arriving in Baghdad came from several American Provinces. The California Province sent Fr. Mifsud, born on the Island of Malta. Because his name had a slightly ignoble meaning locally, he adopted the title of "Fr. Miff". Maltese language has many similarities to Arabic, so when Fr. Miff had a year off to study Arabic, he was accused of spending a year on his native tongue! He was extremely talented in languages, fluent in Maltese, Italian, Spanish, French, Arabic and English. He loved Lebanon in the summer: it gave him a chance to meet Europeans for a change. He would miss American expressions. One evening at recreation after listening to baseball talk, he had a question for Fr. Sheehan
about the infield: "What is this short stuff you're talking about?" He left Baghdad in the mid-sixties, retired to Malta, where he spent his final years. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Mr. Muhammad Serour taught me Arabic. My classmates and I were pleasantly surprised at how well we did in the government exam in Arabic literature, and realized that it was because of this genteel Egyptian teacher with the dower half-smiling face - poetry of the pre-Islamic Jahiliya, speeches of the Prophet and the Imam Ali, poetry of the Mamlukes dynasties, and methods of sentence parsing. With his matter-of-fact monotone voice he made the time and place of the Arabic subject he was teaching reappear in every class period.

In the middle of the fourth year, I fought to get a coveted front row seat in class, near John Mclcon who moved down there earlier, to be nearer that teacher. The current emotions of the Suez war did not disrupt the scenes of the poets. The lessons continued. The appreciation for Arabic literature which I learned at Baghdad College is still enjoyable. After thirty years of worldwide engineering, I chuckle to myself while driving in tiny Holland, and recall the rules for Arabic diminutive nouns. Or composing poetry in the Arabic meter while on a long drive in Texas. Not to shortchange the values of English lessons by Fr. LaBrann of Lancelot and Guinevere in their mime of devotion, still for Arabic literature, Mohammed Serour got top marks. (Allen Svoboda, B.C. '58)

Fr. Joseph O'Connor was born 12/8/23 in Worcester, MA. and worked in Baghdad during the years 1953-56, 61-69. He was my idea of what the ideal missionary should be. His energy level was unbelievable, he was indefatigable always on the go. His warmth, his ready smile and his ebullient good humor was available to everyone. It seemed as if he knew

everyone in Baghdad and they all loved him and when he entered a home, it lit up. His enthusiasm was contagious. He had a personal magnetism that drew others to him. His sincere concern for others was quite apparent. (Mr. Michael Toner)

Fr. John V. Owens was born 1/13/24 and worked in
Baghdad during the years 1957-67. Fr. Owens has been mentioned elsewhere in connection with his courageous death from cancer. It was then that he gave a moving talk on the meaning of death and made a profound impact on the students gathered at a special noon assembly in front of the Administration building. In order to get there he had to be driven over by car because he did not have much stamina. He had enough though to push the car away from the residence where it was parked. A Father (who wishes to be nameless) volunteered to drive him to his appointment at the assembly, but had never driven this German automobile before with its strange shifts. He could find everything except the reverse gear and time was getting short. Fr. Owens took matters into his own hands, jumped out of the car and proceeded to push the vehicle away from the wall so that the novice driver could "get him to the church on time".

Unlike Fr. Gerry, Fr. Owens did not have his own classroom so he was kidded by the other Jesuits whenever he was seen carrying his "box of bones" to his biology class. Most Jesuits did not know anything about biology and could only guess what he used the bones for. He had a very prayerful spirit but was very outgoing and friendly, liked people and had a finely tuned sense of humor. He enjoyed using his wit on other Jesuits who took themselves too seriously. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Walter Pelletier was born 12/19/29 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1954-57, 63-69. During his years at Baghdad College he was a very popular geometry teacher among the students and considered a very dependable and responsible worker by the faculty. He was a successful basketball coach as well as player and instilled in his team a desire to win, not just to "wear out a uniform." He had a wonderful sense of humor which helped him in his job as disciplinarian. At his first noon assembly of the first, second and third year students, he was introduced to this job by Fr. Kelly with the words: "Here is the new muawin, you won't see me here any more." Fr. Kelly then stepped back and fell off the narrow porch out of sight into the bushes below. Fr. Pelletier had an immediate challenge to his ability to maintain composure and to send some 700 delighted students to their classes in a dignified and orderly fashion.

Fr. William Rice worked in Baghdad during the years 1932-39. He knew French quite well but nothing of "Arabic when he arrived. With his little community of Jesuits he had to find living quarters, a school building or one to be made into
a school, learn the local education system, establish good relations with the Ministry of Education, be accepted by the local clergy, and the Catholic hierarchy, consisting of a Chaldean Patriarch, Syrian Archbishop, Armenian Archbishop and a Latin Archbishop who was also the Apostolic Delegate not to mention their Orthodox counterparts. That was the problem, roughly sketched for Fr. Rice by the Jesuits in 1932.

Yet Fr. "Bill" survived it all and won the hearts of many people. Years later I was at one of the Government offices, perhaps the Customs; one of the younger clerks called me over to ask me about Fr. Rice. It seems that Fr. Bill used to "work" the neighborhood on his afternoon break. He practiced the few words of Arabic he had found time to learn by chatting with the neighborhood kids. The customs clerk had been one of those youngsters. He asked for news of Fr. Rice and indicated he had fond memories of their meetings, as proof he pulled from his wallet a picture of Fr. Rice, a picture he carried around with him. It must have been more than his personality that impressed Iraqis. Since he talked French fluently as did the local clergy, they both got to know each other quite well. When the Apostolic Delegate had to leave Iraq, Fr. Rice was readily accepted as temporary Apostolic Delegate. (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. Joseph Ryan was born 12/4/20 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1945-47, 54-68. He taught at Baghdad College from 1945-48. He then returned to the United States for four years of theology and ordination, after which he obtained a M.S. degree in chemistry at Boston College. He returned to Baghdad in January of 1955, expecting to resume teaching at Baghdad College. But on his arrival he learned that, in view of the preparations for the opening of Al-Hikma University, he would become Dean. From 1956 to 1966 he was Dean and from 1966-68 he was Academic Vice-President. In 1962-63, while he studied Arabic at the Jesuit residence on Rawaf St. near the White House, Fr. Frederick Kelly was acting Dean in his place.

When the Al-Hikma Jesuits left Baghdad in November 1968, Fr. Ryan returned to the United States and became a Fellow of the Cambridge Center for Social Studies in Cambridge, Massachusetts. From 1971 to 1975 he was a member of the Center for the Study of the Modern Arab World at St. Joseph's University in Beirut. He returned to the United States and was Rector of the Jesuit Community at Holy Cross College from 1977-83. In January 1984 he went to Amman, Jordan as the
Director of the office of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine. After seven years in Amman, he returned to the United States. He is now a spiritual director and retreat director at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut.

In the early seventies Fr. Ryan conducted six extensive national speaking tours in the United States, each tour lasting two months. In public lectures, in interviews for newspapers and on TV and radio, he spoke about the problem of Palestine, the city of Jerusalem, the Catholic Church and the Middle East, the responsibility of Americans regarding peace in the Middle East, and anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. (Fr. MacDonnell)

All the Jesuits at Al-Hikma positively influenced my life. They made me understand the joys of the Catholic faith. Their dedication, grace, and values were worthy of imitation. By far, Rev. Joseph L. Ryan remains at the top of my list. Without him I would not have been able to go to college, a dream I always cherished. When I lost my business and all of my money 20 years after graduation, he was there for me. He gave me a job and helped me pick up the pieces. To me, he is a true saint to whom I shall always be grateful. Rev. Robert B. Campbell and Rev. Joseph F. MacDonnell also are particularly dear to my heart. (Edward Butros, A.H. '68)

Fr. Solomon Sara was born 5/1/30 in Mangaish, Iraq and worked in Baghdad during the years 1957-60. He has been mentioned in Chapter 5 during the discussion of Jesuit Vocations. When he returned to Iraq in 1947 for his teaching experience, he found he had plenty to do. Besides his teaching duties he had plenty to do such as running the school library, directing the junior section of the boarding school, running seven catechetical centers for Baghdad public school children and being the secretary to the Chaldean Patriarch for ecumenical affairs.

In 1960 he returned to Weston College for theology, then to Georgetown University to study linguistics for the express
purpose of joining the proposed center at Al-Hikma for graduate work. Unfortunately these plans were never realized because of the expulsion of the Jesuits. He has been a member of the Linguistic Department at Georgetown University since 1969. (Fr. MacDonnell)

Fr. Francis Sarjeant was born 7/21/00 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1934-48. He succeeded Fr. Rice as Superior, and one evening counted the objects he carried to the roof to prepare for sleep. He carried a loaded flint gun to kill off any sand flies that had managed to get inside the net, brush to remove the dead flies from the pillow, a woolen belly-band to ward off cramps when the temperature dropped 40 degrees, a small alarm clock, just in case the scholastic appointed to ring the bell at 4 a.m. failed to fulfill his appointed duty! On Rogation Days, the litanies were recited by all gathered in chapel at 4:20 a.m., so the first Mass could begin at 4:30! Fr. Sarjeant’s favorite expressions were: "Come in, Father, and take your shoes off!" When leaving his room, he would encourage us to "Keep rushing forward on your white charger!" Like Fr. Rice, he spoke fluent French to handle all clerical and Episcopal visitors, and he was the confessor of the Apostolic Delegate. He later joined the community at Holy Cross College in Worcester, MA. (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. Leo J. Shea was born 12/28/03 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1938-47, 48-69. If one had a bad cold, he would advise going to bed and forget class. He called himself "an old man but a young priest". People would come to him looking for a donation of blood, but a bout of malaria prevented him donating his, so he would ask other Fathers to donate theirs. One pointed out that those seeking blood would refuse to give blood to their close relatives! After leaving Baghdad, he began a ministry in Egypt to help Christians in family planning. He died October 1993. (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. William Sheehan was born 9/1/02 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1936-47, 48-66. He taught math and physics: his laboratory on the second floor of the Science Building was always kept in perfect order. During the marvelous Baghdad weather of the Christmas holidays, he loved to bat out long fly balls to the scholastics on the empty baseball field.

Students of Baghdad College loved handball, played using hands and also using the feet to kick the ball after the first bounce. The handball courts never had a moment’s rest before
and after school, and during lunch periods. The surface was made of yellow brick: when the bricks developed deep holes worn out by so many feet, workmen turned them over to use the smooth side on the bottom! The basketball and volleyball courts were made the same way. The battle cry of our players was the expression: "Never give up!" This brave phrase originated with the athlete of the early Fathers, Fr. Sheehan of Somerville "on the wrong side of the tracks", who modestly dubbed himself: "The Champ". (Fr. Fennell)

Fr. Sheehan's physics class

Fr. Robert Sullivan was born 5/5/12 and worked in Baghdad during the years 1943-51, 52-69. He taught algebra and trigonometry and then was asked to coach the school basketball team and regularly worked out with his boys. In time he got a Debating Society going, and each year coached contestants in the Elocution Contest. Then he became mudeer for nine years where he realized that the English teaching needed to be strengthened so he and Camille Tebshehany through the generous support of the Ford Foundation were able to set up a modern English Lab, and this program did much to increase the ability of the students to handle English with facility. At the request of the Ministry of Education a program was set up for teachers of English in government schools, to help them increase their skills by using modern methods. He was also instrumental in getting passive language labs set up in several government schools in Baghdad.

Along with these developments, directors of the Ford Foundation asked his assistance with a program they had in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. They were attempting to train young men in Public Administration and asked us to help the English language skills of the students. Mr. Tebshehany wrote the materials and I assisted teachers for this task. While engaged in this he was approached by the University of Petroleum and
Minerals with the request to assist them in an English language program for their students. When he was expelled from Baghdad he was assigned to this work and spent the next three years at the University, directing the program and doing some teaching. (Fr. MacDonnell)

The Lay Volunteer Program ("Misteria")

During the last decade of the mission a Lay Volunteer program had developed, partly due to the zeal of people like Fr. LaBran who by this time was a chaplain at Holy Cross College. This program was the precursor of today's "Jesuit International Volunteer Corps" (J.I.V.C.) and on a smaller scale the five "Jesuit Volunteer Corps" (JVC) programs: East, Midwest, Northwest, Southwest and South. College graduates - mostly American - came and lived in the Jesuit Community for two years and taught their specialty in the schools - mostly English and mathematics. They received their room and board as well as a modest stipend (ID 20 or $56 per month) to cover their expenses for the year so that they left Baghdad neither richer nor poorer than when they arrived. Each year the number of these altruistic young volunteers increased. From one single courageous man, Richard T. Wotruba of Holy Cross '60, who came for the 1960-61 year the program rapidly grew to about 13 volunteers a year. Some spent two years and some spent one. By 1969 there had been a total of 90 Lay Volunteer who had at some time participated in the educational work of the Jesuits.
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These young teachers had a marvelous effect on the student body as well as on the Jesuit community. All were quite different individuals from different backgrounds — and even different countries and this broadened the vision of the students they taught. Students learned from them a great deal about the dedication of Catholic laymen. The Baghdad Jesuits, on the other hand became well attuned to the attitudes of modern Catholic college graduates.

A tremendous benefit of the Jesuit educational contribution in Baghdad came from the volunteered assistance of young lay men and women from several countries who offered their talents and gifts to Baghdad College and Al-Hikma University.

These Jesuit volunteers were very generous, lively people, reflecting a dedication to the same goals and aspirations of the Jesuits in Baghdad. They were generous well beyond their teaching assignments. Many remained involved in Middle Eastern and international affairs. Four became Jesuits.

Especially noticeable were the groups of graduates from American Jesuit Colleges. Forty-four graduates from Boston College, Holy Cross College and Fairfield University during the years 1961 through 1969 taught at Baghdad College. Seventeen of these young men remained a second year.

At Al-Hikma approximately the same number of volunteers came, principally from the United States but also from Ireland, Germany, Holland and the Philippines. This included fifteen scholars on sabbatics, including seven Nuns. Their generous services indeed added an international flavor to the faculty. Their influence continues as a number of these men and women later welcomed their former Baghdad students into graduate work in their own institutions. (Fr. O'Connor)

Lay Volunteers

The memories of their experiences in Baghdad were very vivid in the minds of these volunteers and some of them expressed their opinions about the people that meant most to them.
As a young and young-looking teacher, I think I was an inviting target for certain students who would take advantage of my inexperience. The mudeer, Fr. Powers became my mentor, and many times helped me to maneuver out of difficult situations. I admired his coolness under fire, as did many other Misteria, and a favorite story involved the arrival of Iraqi soldiers at the front door of the administration building, whereupon Fr. Powers agreed to talk with them... "Just send them in one at a time." I don't like to focus on one Jesuit however because the entire Community was something to behold in its dedication to God, to the school and to each other. My father had always told me that the Jesuits were "quite hospitable", and they more than filled that description. The Jesuits I knew were giants, and I am grateful for having known them early in my life. (Mr. Ed Reynolds)

Chemist, Mr. John Dempsey 1962

My fellow Misteria were a fun-loving group who were also very dedicated to their students and they were quite adventuresome. More importantly, I think we encouraged each other when things were difficult. The Misteria community made many things possible.

I've been very fortunate to have the opportunity of participating in medical relief efforts to Haiti in the past couple of years. We do cleft lip repairs and other surgery in the field and at a clinic in Jeremy, which is on the north shore of the southern tip, about 8 hours by truck from
Port aux Prince. The clinic is run by an order of medical missionary sisters, and I confess to taking pleasure in an atmosphere which is terribly reminiscent of Baghdad. (Mr. Ed Reynolds)

My students at Baghdad College taught me how to study. Prior to my teaching experience I had placed tremendous emphasis on my own originality and creativity, and much less emphasis on retaining and understanding the work of others. When I corrected their exams - I tried to reward "originality" but quickly found that it was sometimes used to mask a lack of familiarity with the material. The students who succeeded were the "grinds", in spite of my prejudice in favor of the flamboyant. More important, when I saw how thoroughly my students would learn material in a second language, I knew that I would never again feel comfortable with a sloppy approach to learning myself. My students were earnest and gentle, with a reverence for learning which I had not appreciated before coming to Baghdad. Both Christian and Muslim students valued their faith, and felt no embarrassment about it. I liked that. (Mr. Ed Reynolds)

I think all the Baghdadis must worry about what the Gulf War did to the Iraqi people. I know that I have great difficulty reconciling my knowledge of the gentle people I knew with the terrible violence which was unleashed.

The children of the workmen were a special project of mine and I taught them to speak English. At Christmas time I taught them to sing Christmas carols and we performed for the "Fatheria" as well as at the Chaldean seminary. When we were at the seminary and while we were singing "We Wish you A Merry Christmas" two of the children spontaneously jumped up on the stage and started shaking hands, wishing each other a "Merry Christmas". The smiles on their faces and the spontaneity of it all just knocked me out. It was one of the greatest feelings I have ever experienced. It was pure joy and showed me that I was having an impact. (Mr. Mike Toner)
The Jesuit Superior General, Fr. Arrupe visiting the lay volunteers

On a trip to Ur of the Chaldees, Fr. John McCarthy and Mr. Kerry Holland with a group of lay volunteers got lost at night in the desert to the west of the Euphrates. As they were driving in circles, a light started to flash from a Bedouin camp in the distance to attract their attention. Apparently the Arabs knew they were in difficulty. So they went to the Bedouin camp, accepted their hospitality; then proceeded in the correct direction.

Misters who taught them. The ones with John Robert's New Orleans accent were the best. By Thanksgiving and Christmas the first year Baghdad College students understanding of English was incredibly good. As a teacher I learned something: that motivated kids can do anything including learning math with different numbers from men who do not even speak their language. (Mr. Finlay)

The lay volunteers not only gave a great deal but gained very much in their own personal lives. This was quite apparent at a lay volunteer-Jesuit reunion weekend held at Fairfield University in 1974 to commemorate the fifth anniversary of expulsion. Some 37 lay volunteers and 23 Jesuits participated. By this time all volunteers had done many interesting things, such as gotten married, had children, earned higher degrees, moved ahead in industry or taken teaching positions. But the remarkable thing about this reunion was that the conversations and discussions never seemed to veer away from their experiences teaching the youth of Iraq. One of the lay volunteers, Mr. Joseph Flibbert, mentions his own reaction.
I'm currently Professor of English at Salem State College, where I've been teaching for the past 24 years. I have my Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and have written a book on Herman Melville. I am widowed, remarried, and the father of three sons. One of them is fluent in Arabic, having studied it at Georgetown, the University of Virginia, and the American University in Cairo. He is working on a Ph.D. in Political Science at Columbia, with a concentration on Arabic Studies. Another son is working on a law degree in Washington. The third is fluent in Japanese and is currently working as an international relations coordinator for a small city in Japan. So as you can see, my experiences as a lay volunteer in Iraq have had some influence on my children's professional interests.

I came to Al-Hikma University in September, 1961 as a lay volunteer, ready for adventure and left a year later with a deep appreciation for the good things the Jesuits were doing in Iraq, a strong affection for the Iraqi people and their culture, and a better understanding of myself and my own culture. I learned a whole lot more than I taught, thanks to the patience, experience, and insights of my Jesuit colleagues, and to the hospitality, friendship, and generosity of my students. I have especially fond memories of Fr. Leo McDonough, who loaned me his American music when he sensed I was homesick, Fr. Kelly, who let me help out with the basketball team and who bailed me out when I got over my head with the Drama Society I started, and Fr. Joe Ryan, whose tips on how to behave kept me from many social blunders. My deepest depth is to Fr. Walter Young, friend and confidant, a great "street" priest who took me with him into the city and introduced me to some of the best experiences I had in Iraq. More than 30 years later, I still have vivid memories of the basketball exploits of Shamuel "Shumi" Yusuf and Hikmat Basmaji, of the leadership skills of Waeli Hindu and Wilson Benjamin, of the acting talent of Kamal Dinkha, of the academic brilliance of Fawzi (Habib) Hermes, Sami Madros, and Sami al-Banna and of the fun-loving nature of Adil Wadi and Sirbest Qazzaz. It was a good time. It was the best of times. (Mr. Joseph Flibbert)

When Dr. Bill Ferrante had to return to the States in mid-second semester due to illness, a remarkable testimony was paid to him from all his students who sadly crowded the airport on the morning of his departure. A
small group of them stood with one of the Fathers sad and silent. The students had raised a question among themselves and then posed it to the Jesuit. "Father, why does God allow such a thing to happen?" God gave us a tough, demanding but very fair teacher for a few months. Dr. Ferrante liked us very much and worked hard for us. We realize that. But now he has been taken from us, even before we finish the school year. Why? The Jesuit Father agreed that the question is an important one and suggested that they think about it, ponder it for a few days, and see what response they might come up with. A few days later, the small group approached the Jesuit on the campus at Al-Hikma and asked to talk. "We have an answer, we think! We've decided that perhaps God gives us such a fine man for a short time to show us that such goodness and generosity is possible. It is real. It can be done. We've experienced that. Maybe God is telling us that now it is up to us to choose to become equally good men." (Fr. O'Connor)