

Chapter Fourteen

FOUNDING THE FIRST RETREAT HOUSE

Prior to the opening of Campion Hall at North Andover, Massachusetts on the weekend of May 14-16, 1937, weekend retreats for laymen had been conducted at Bellarmine House, Cohasset from September to June since 1935. Due to the sudden and unexpected death of Fr. Edward P. Tivnan on March 31, 1937, Fr. John J. McGrory was appointed on April 3 as Campion's director. When New England was first set up as a vice-province in 1921, there was only one retreat house for men in the Maryland-New York Province. This was Manresa on Staten Island founded in 1911 by Fr. Terence Shealy after some years of experimenting with such retreat groups. Within two weeks after the creation of the New England Province on July 31, 1926, a second retreat house was opened in the Maryland portion of the old province on August 13, 1926. A small group of Loyola (Baltimore) College alumni had arranged in 1913 for a late summer weekend retreat with authorities at Baltimore and used facilities at Georgetown for the retreats. This arrangement continued until numbers were so large by 1921, that the locale had to be shifted to Mt. St. Mary's College at Emmitsburg, Maryland. With the appointment of Fr. Eugene McDonnell as chaplain of this growing group of retreatants in early 1926, property was acquired along the Severn River in Maryland. Manresa-on-the-Severn, as the retreat house was named, opened in the August of the same year. The first retreat there was given by Fr. James I. McGuire who, while at Boston College in the early days of planning and building the Tower Building (now Gasson Hall), had interested, perhaps over-interested, Boston Irish societies in gifts for the newly located college. The very next year, 1927, saw a third retreat house, one for the Jersey section of the older province. This house and property in Morristown, New Jersey was the gift of Mr. Welcome Benders and his wife. It was given through his friendship with Fr. Hermann I. Storck, a full-time director of retreats, who became its first director.

During this same period of time and after the special efforts of Bishop Guertin of Manchester and the offer of Bishop Murray for a retreat house in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, there was some New England movement toward a similar retreat house for men. In 1926, Fr. Kilroy and Fr. Tivnan examined property in Nahant, Massachusetts for some possible uses including retreat work. Fr. Kilroy was adverse to the establishment of a new house in the Boston area, as was also Fr. General. Fr. Tivnan found the place too unsatisfactory for a partial use as a province villa. In 1929, Fr. Francis X. Downey proposed a place in Newtown, Connecticut as a site. This suggestion came to naught.

If the New England vice-province and early province had no re-

treat house for men (and accommodations for women would have to wait the aftermath of Vatican II and the 31st General Congregation), there was retreat activity in the province. It has been noted that Fr. Joseph N. Dinand, imitating or paralleling the Baltimore-Georgetown example, had begun laymen's retreats at Holy Cross in 1915 using its facilities for a weekend, and these activities continued in the early days of the independent province. But Holy Cross was also the seat of another retreat activity beginning shortly after the close of the academic school year. Then from a Monday evening to a Saturday morning, diocesan priests gathered in a two-week system for an annual retreat. There was a time when this movement covered priests from the dioceses of Providence, Fall River, Hartford and Springfield. This last diocese then included the territory of the present Worcester diocese. With time, only the Springfield diocese priests had their annual retreat at Holy Cross. For these retreats at Holy Cross, it was Jesuit priests who directed. A somewhat similar arrangement obtained at Keyser Island from the time Bishop Tierney of Hartford had his priests' retreat there for two weeks in late August. This practice continued to 1930 when the new St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield was ready, and until 1945 Jesuits regularly gave the retreats there. Even when there was no equivalent of Holy Cross or Keyser Island for these clerical retreats, Jesuits most commonly gave the exercises in most of the eastern dioceses and in Nova Scotia. There were some strange exceptions. When in 1932, Fr. Jones I.J. Corrigan and Fr. Charles L. O'Brien were each assigned two weeks of retreat for the clergy of the Boston archdiocese, it was noted in the diary of the Socius that this was the first such invitation in 15 years for the Boston priests' retreat.

But retreats were not limited to the clergy or to the lay groups at Holy Cross College. University and secondary school students in Jesuit establishments made annual retreats with Jesuit directors. As a college student at Holy Cross in 1919-1920, the present writer recalls the points of Fr. John J. Corbett, editor of the Messenger of the Sacred Heart, and the more inspiring ones of Fr. Robert J. Swickerath during the school year, and the presence of Fr. J. Harding Fisher for the senior year-end retreat. Sisters in great numbers employed the services of Jesuit retreat masters for their annual summer retreats when they commonly gathered in huge numbers for this purpose. Only one group, it is reported, wished to be sure the retreat master was a professed father. Religious brothers also called on Jesuits, especially the Xaverian Brothers, as from time to time did members of clerical societies when they had retreats in common. When lay women met for brief retreats in Cenacles in New York, Brighton and Ronkonkama, and in the academies and mother houses of different religious women, Jesuits were most commonly called for this work. All in all, even without a formal retreat house, the Ignatian ideals were thus held up for many influential groups to experience and hopefully to follow. Early in religious life it was drilled into young Jesuits how effective and far-reaching could be time spent in teaching sisters in summer sessions as well as in giving them retreats, because

what one implanted in their minds could bear fruit a hundred and a thousand fold in their pupils. This exhortation of Fr. J.F.X. Murphy was beneficent. Thus Jesuits' interior convictions, clothed as well as they could be forceably, became a widening influence through what was done for large groups of nun retreatants.

During these formative years prior to the establishment of a retreat house at Cohasset in 1935 and at North Andover in 1937, the New England vice-province and province had its distinguished retreat givers. While distant Maryland-New York hills are green with the names of John H. O'Rourke, Charles Connor, Daniel Quinn and others, they were matched by Charles W. Lyons, Edward P. Tivnan, James L. McGovern, Robert Swickerath, William J. Stanton and Joseph N. Dinand, to mention a few.

Even though the early establishment of a retreat house was an expressed goal of Fr. Patrick F. O'Gorman, it was not realized until the expansion from two cities was begun and urged on by Fr. James H. Dolan both as Socius and as Provincial from 1932-1944. His expansion included a retreat house to be begun as well as schools to be accepted or sought out. When it came time to make the hard push for a retreat house, no search was necessary for a site as later would be the case for locating a separate provincial residence and a school location in the Bridgeport area. In the July 24, 1936 province consultants' meeting, a place would be pointed out which had been carefully appraised a few years before when a location was sought for a tertian-ship. When the Hoppin place at Pomfret was suddenly available for \$35,000, Hardcourt, the Kuhnhart property at North Andover, had been eagerly considered for \$60,000. Since that property was still on the market, and its mansion still idle, a purchase at a reasonable price appeared possible. Its value, while still satisfactory, would be reduced by the owner from \$60,000 to somewhere between \$40,000 and \$50,000. So, quietly on August 8, a request went to Rome for authorization to purchase and a favorable reply was received on August 25, 1935. In this same letter, Fr. General declined permission for its temporary use as a provincial residence. On that very day, Cardinal O'Connell gave his approbation for a new religious house in the Boston archdiocese for retreat work.

No time was lost in effecting a purchase. On September 16, 1936 Hardcourt was bought for \$43,500, and the deeds registered in the city of Lawrence registry of deeds. The sale was effected through an intermediary represented by a Mr. Davis of 6 Beacon Street, and then conveyed to the province under its charter as the Society of Jesus of New England. The following day the purchase was announced in the Boston Post. By the terms of the sale, Mrs. Kuhnhart was allowed to live in the guest house until September of 1937.

At once, Fr. Dolan began negotiating with firms on repairs, alterations and furnishings. Such business details occupied much of his time from September 26, 1936 until his appointment as provincial

on May 6, 1937. This was just a few days before he left for the joint U.S. provincials' meetings with Fr. General and his own first provincial visit to the mission in Baghdad. The Walsh Brothers, who had built the addition on Pomfret, were selected as contractors for alteration and repairs in the main building and guest house. With one of the Walsh Brothers, Fr. Dolan visited the estate on September 26, and obtained the keys to a dining room cabinet which contained the combinations to two safes. Whatever of Mrs. Kuhnhart's belongings needed safe-keeping were stored in one safe; the other was for Society valuables. Planning for heat was the next item. It was planned to use a control unit of the Eastern Heat Control Company, but it was discovered that the existing arrangements precluded this possibility. Hence the Poole Engineering Company of Lowell and Lawrence was employed.

One early problem arose due to the long period of time during which the house had not been heated or only inadequately heated. The heating equipment had not been used in any way for four years, and in the previous seven years, it had only been used to take the chill off the place. So it was not surprising that in 1934 the water valve had broken and the cellar had been flooded, which demanded early attention. It was also soon realized that the roof of the garage needed immediate repair. Plans, too, had to be devised to add to the drawing room, which was to serve as a chapel. Samples of color and graining for the painting of the chapel were purchased from the M.L. McDermott Painting Company. Electrical work was entrusted to the M. B. Foster Electrical Company. Window shades were studied with a representative of the Acme Shade Company of Brookline, which had recently supplied Pomfret with shades. Most of the furniture in the sleeping quarters and office were purchased from the Paine Furniture Company. Dealings with these concerns, inspecting their products and supervising deliveries consumed many hours of Fr. Dolan's time from late September to the end of December, 1936.

At that time, some assistance was then required. Br. Francis J. McGuinness was assigned from Keyser Island to the curia, as yet at Boston College, to assist Fr. Dolan. His chief work seemed to have been chauffeuring Fr. Dolan to and from suppliers, and to and from North Andover for frequent inspection tours. The original plans to move retreat work and director from Cohasset to North Andover were stymied by the death of Fr. Tivnan. But quickly on April 3, Fr. John T. McGrury, then a member of the Mission Band, was appointed director and on April 12 he viewed the existing arrangements with Fr. Dolan. Because Fr. McGrury had to divest himself of current as well as later assignments and arrangements, he could not come and stay permanently at North Andover. Among other tasks, he had planned summer weekend help at Old Lyme, Connecticut. On one of his frequent visits to St. Mary's in the North End he had arranged with a Harvard graduate student to take the assignments, which, with one short break, lasted until 1955. So, Fr. Dolan sought some other early arrival who could give full time to the work of preparing the retreat house. Hence he

went with Fr. Provincial (James T. McCormick) to Pomfret on April 15 to discuss with Fr. Fox the temporary disassociation of Fr. Leo A. Fair from his post as Minister. Then Fr. Fair could serve as acting Minister at North Andover until the end of June. Only on the following day was Fr. Fair informed of his temporary change in status. He was then instructed to take up residence along with Fr. McGrory on Thursday, April 22, but another mishap held up the day of arrival. The electric stove, ordered by Fr. William A. Lynch, did not arrive on the planned date, and when it did arrive its small size of 27" by 36" was judged inadequate by a visiting chef from Cohasset. What happened is not said.

The arrival of an acting Minister and the superior on April 26 after a few days of delay did not strip Fr. Dolan of his labors on acquisitions and decisions. After their appointment, but prior to their residence, Fr. Dolan selected leather chairs on April 17 at the Ideal Chair Company, 116 Portland Street, Boston. On the 20th he was at Paine's in Boston and then at the Michael Sullivan Furniture Company of Lawrence and North Andover. From Sullivan's were ordered 12 armchairs and three carpets for the retreatant's conference room. On the following day a representative of Sullivan's came to Boston College to display Pebbleware carpeting for the main chapel and two house chapels. On April 23, Fr. Fair did accompany Fr. Dolan to Baker's of Boston to inspect candle sticks, but no purchases were made that day. A few days later Fr. Dolan discussed parlor furniture with a Canisius College graduate, representing the Columbiana Furniture Company of Columbus, Ohio, which had been recommended by Sullivan's. Before April was over, Fr. Dolan initiated action on phones for the retreat house.

This is as far, it seems from the records, as Fr. Dolan's activities concerned themselves in setting up Campion Hall. His last inspection tour was on April 26. On May 6, 1937, after taking the required oaths at eleven in the morning, he was read in as Provincial at noon. This office he was to hold until December 8, 1944. He closed the Socius' diary with this prayer for this work as Provincial, "Quod Deus benedictione indeficente adjuvet".

On May 16, Fr. William J. Murphy as acting socius under acting-Provincial James T. McCormick, visited North Andover and witnessed the Sunday activities of the first weekend retreat. Thirteen members of the Boston College class of 1916, of which Fr. Murphy was an ex-man after two years of college, were making the initial retreat. Fr. McGrory indicated his satisfaction with the arrangements Fr. Dolan had effected. In the early years, retreatants lived several in a room and this was not the most ideal arrangement. It encouraged less silence and recollection which were made more possible when each retreatant had his own room. It did encourage comradery if not contemplation.

Dated February 23, 1938, some nine months after the opening, is

a document in the province archives detailing in one page succinctly the retreat movement to that date. There had been 32 retreats and 520 retreatants -- an average of roughly 16 to a retreat. An attempt had been made to have as many sessions as possible last for five days, i.e. three full days of retreat with the night of arrival and the morning of departure. Five of the reported 32 had been of this duration, and six more had been so far planned for 1938-39. Most retreatants had found so protracted a weekend an economic burden or a burden on those helping them with transportation; movie operators had to pay for substitutes. Family members or friends had to travel early on Monday morning to have retreatants back to work at eight o'clock. Moreover, the two other retreat houses in the area, in Brighton and Brookline, began on Friday not Thursday evening, and concluded on Sunday afternoon not Monday morning. Thus they gave no moral support for a weekend retreat beginning Thursday evening and ending Monday morning. This more extended retreat plan must have proved so illusory that it was abandoned early. In the beginning there was a question box period, but at the suggestion of Fr. General this was abandoned and replaced by a conference which often covered a question box type of matter. If similar and helpful memoranda were written, there has not been found any trace of them in the archives.

A notable gift during the initial year is worth mentioning. On July 14, 1937 Fr. Ambrose Dore, the pastor of St. Paul's in Wellesley and the brother of Fr. Francis J. Dore, head of the Boston College Department of Biology, and of Fr. Leo A. Dore, then Superior of St. Mary's Church, sent a consignment of vestments, vases, pictures and books. On the same day Cardinal O'Connell visited and expressed his pleasure with the arrangements.

A somewhat unusual but perhaps far-sighted request was made to the province consultors. This was a proposal that the province take over the ownership of the Spiritual Book Association and have its activities managed from Campion Hall. Much early work with this association and Miss Kiley of Providence, its early executive secretary, was done by Fr. Francis X. Downey who like Fr. McGrory had once been attached to the Mission Band. In June, 1934 when Fr. F.X. Talbot was Editorial Chairman of the Spiritual Book Club, Fr. Downey was granted permission to be its Secretary. For personal reasons, this position did not last. Another mission band member with strong linkage to this association was Fr. Daniel F. Ryan. The province consultors did not consider the proposal for purchase and management to be practical. What sum was asked is not clear, and how the prospects of this bookclub seemed at that date are not known. But in time, Notre Dame University acquired the assets, and became editorially responsible for promotion and selections. Jesuits often complain of Notre Dame's overshare in Catholic representation in public matters. Here was an opportunity to have had the spiritual book activity first, but Fr. Downey's drive and salesmanship qualities and Fr. Ryan's reading and gift of selecting books did not have a rewarding outlet.

In view of this lost opportunity to give leadership in spiritual reading, it is interesting to note some of the proposals for magazine publications that were considered by Province officials and left to lie fallow. In the consultors' meeting of October 15, 1926, there was a proposal endorsed by the consultors for the publication of an American analogue to a Belgium journal on religious life. It was, however, judged that no one was currently available for such a task. So the project was placed on a back-burner and evidently burned itself out. In late December of 1933, Fr. Fox in his first year as tertian instructor, urged the publication of a periodical on temperance, and he was authorized to draw up a plan. No more is heard of this somewhat narrow-in-content magazine. Its contributors might have sought a regular column in some general Catholic magazine or in a weekly Catholic paper. If the New England province did not contribute to letters in these three ways, it did allow Fr. William J. McGarry to give up the rectorship of Boston College in 1939 and become the first editor of Theological Studies which began its course in 1940 as an assistant project. But here God's providence entered, and Fr. McGarry died in a New York subway station on September 23, 1941. A great and promising career was ended.

Many events, somewhat small in themselves and not over-extended in time, frequently overlap an event of more meaning, and would easily be lost if they were not connected even arbitrarily with this more significant activity. This appears to be true of the task which Fr. General imposed on Fr. Dolan to be an inspector-general of the financial administration of the New England province and its major and minor houses. During much of the time when Fr. Dolan was completing a search for the first separate provincial residence and supervising the repairs and furnishings of North Andover, he was engaged in this financial supervision. This job entailed much coming and going, conferring and drawing up of a final report. It was on February 18, 1936 that Fr. Dolan's name was approved by Fr. General as the Inspector General of the financial administration of the New England province and its houses. On March 10, letters were forwarded to the houses informing them of this special financial inspection.

By April 1, 1936 the investigative process began. On that day Fr. Dolan introduced public accountants from the firm of Fox, Gill and O'Brien to the treasurer's office at Boston College where Fr. Daniel J. Lynch was procurator and Fr. William Corliss his assistant. Presumably the inspection of the books then began. On April 30, accountants of this same firm were introduced by Fr. Dolan at the treasurer's office at 761 Harrison Avenue, and to Fr. James F. Mellyn, the treasurer of the school, church and community. A similar introduction was also made personally by Fr. Dolan at Holy Cross on May 4 to Fr. J. Joseph Reilly, the treasurer and to Mr. Frank Miller, Sr., who had worked in this office since Fr. Jeff Lehy's time. After these personal introductions the accountants made the necessary study of records so as to report on their findings to Fr. Dolan.

Small houses, it soon appeared, would require some lesser systems of financial arrangements. Hence on August 4, Fr. Dolan arranged for an interview with Mr. William Kelly, the brother of Fr. Joseph P. Kelly. In an interview with Mr. Kelly on August 6, Fr. Dolan learned that while Mr. Kelly was a graduate of the Bentley School of Accounting, he was not a C.P.A. This fact did not matter since only a simple but uniform system was sought for the smaller houses and also for the province books. With Mr. Kelly hired on August 6, he began his inspections on August 20 at St. Mary's where Fr. Frank Reilly was both minister and treasurer. Only in the following summer were these positions separated with the appointment of Fr. Joseph C. Moynihan as treasurer. No full account is given of all Mr. Kelly's visits, but some are noted with the implication of a formal introduction by Fr. Dolan. In November and December of 1936, Fr. Kelly examined the books of the province, of Holy Trinity and Pomfret. Fr. Dolan personally discussed the matter with Fr. Lyons at Shadowbrook.

There was a return visit by the team of auditors to the larger houses during the last half of November. Then on December 6, Fr. Dolan conferred with Mr. John Drummey, the senior auditor of the accounting firm which had studied the systems of the larger houses. A contract was drawn up and signed on December 19 to install an accrual system at Boston College, Boston College High School and Holy Cross. Mr. Drummey was employed to tutor the Jesuit procurators in the accrual system and in the efficient supervision of a treasurer's office.

This arrangement left Fr. Dolan more free time to serve as vice-provincial from January 1, 1937 to February 18, 1937 when Fr. McCormick was attending an anniversary celebration in Jamaica and conducting a mission visitation. On January 5, Mr. Kelly initiated the installation of a simple system for the smaller houses. This system was on a cash basis with a cash memo book, a journal and a ledger. Mimeographed instructions were prepared to make this as simple as possible. The next stage consisted of a weekly seminar of two hours duration to run over a ten month period exclusive of Christmas and summer vacations. The original members of the Drummey seminar were Frs. William Lynch, J. Joseph Reilly, Louis Halliwell, John Keegan and Br. Thomas J. Howarth. In time there were classes for more treasurers from the smaller province houses. Finally on April 18, 1937 Fr. Dolan had ready the body of data and solutions that had been requested by Fr. General. Actually, this material had been requested for December 31, 1936. This financial experience put Fr. Dolan in a strong position to understand the financial reports and true conditions of the houses over which he became provincial in a little less than a month after his forwarding the material to Rome. To this financial schooling was soon to be added his almost immediate departure on May 13 for Rome where the provincials of the American Assistency were students in one of Fr. General's seminars on spiritual formation and supervision.